Student Retention and Transition Series

IMPROVING STUDENT RETENTION IN ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A. J. C. KING
W. K. WARREN
C. MICHALSKI
M. J. PEART

This research project was funded under contract by the Ministry of Education, Ontario.
It reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Ministry.

Chris Ward, Minister
Bernard J. Shapiro, Deputy Minister

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ABSTRACT xi

I INTRODUCTION 1

A. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY 1

B. BACKGROUND 1

1. The Early School Leaver 1
   a) Who Are the Dropouts? 3
   b) Why Do Students Leave School Early? 4
   c) What Conditions Would Help to Keep Dropouts in School? 5
   d) Career Opportunities for Graduates and Non-Graduates 6
2. Part-time Work 7
3. Prevention Programs 8
4. Educational Reforms 9

C. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY 9

D. METHODOLOGY 10

1. Definitions 10
   a) Dropouts 10
   b) Student Categories 11
2. Data Collection 11
   a) Part I: Influence of Credit Accumulation and Academic Achievement Patterns on School Retention 11
   b) Part II: Exemplary Programs for Students Who Take Mainly General-Level Courses 12
   c) Part III: Exemplary Programs for Students Who Take Mainly Basic-Level Courses 13
   d) Part IV: The Influence of Part-time Employment on School Leaving 13
3. Data Analysis and Summary 13

E. ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT 14

II THE EARLY LEAVER 15

A. INTRODUCTION 15

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DROPOUTS 15

C. TRANSITION TO WORK 20

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont'd.)

Page

II THE EARLY LEAVER (cont'd)

D. DROPOUTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SCHOOL EXPERIENCES 23
E. SUMMARY 25

III PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT OF STUDENTS 26
A. INTRODUCTION 26
B. EXTENT OF PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT 26
C. EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES 29
  1. Economic Benefits 30
  2. Hiring Factors 30
  3. Transition to Work 31
  4. Hours of Work 31
D. INFLUENCE OF HOURS WORKED 31
E. IMPACT ON TRANSITION TO WORK 34
F. SUMMARY 36

IV EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT 37
A. INTRODUCTION 37
B. COURSE SUCCESS RATES AND MARKS DISTRIBUTIONS 38
C. CREDIT ACCUMULATION PATTERNS 49
D. APPROACHES TO STUDENT EVALUATION 51
  1. How Teachers Evaluate Students 51
  2. Teaching to Pass 54
  3. Making the Grade 55
E. SUMMARY 57

V EXEMPLARY PROGRAMMING AT THE BASIC LEVEL 59
A. INTRODUCTION 59
B. WHO ARE THE STUDENTS AT THE BASIC LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY? 59

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont'd)

Page

V EXEMPLARY PROGRAMMING AT THE BASIC LEVEL (cont'd)

C. SELECTION OF THE EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS 61

D. PROGRAM RETENTION 62

  1. Composite Schools 62
  2. Vocational Schools 64

E. PROGRAM APPROACHES 68

F. SEQUENCING AND PACKAGING OF COURSES 71

G. CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION AND WORK EXPERIENCE 73

H. COUNSELLING 76

I. ATTENDANCE DISCIPLINE/CODE OF CONDUCT 78

J. SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE/CLIMATE , 80

K. ROLE OF THE IPRC PROCESS 82

L. REMEDIATION 84

M. TEACHER PERCEPTIONS 85

N. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS 88

O. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS 90

P. SUMMARY 91

VI GENERAL-LEVEL PROGRAMS 94

A. INTRODUCTION 94

B. WHO ARE THE STUDENTS WHAT IS A GENERAL-LEVEL PROGRAM? 94

C. SELECTION OF EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS 96

D. PROGRAM RETENTION AND CREDIT ACCUMULATION 99

E. PROGRAM APPROACHES 104

F. SEQUENCING PACKAGING 107

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont'd)

Page

VI GENERAL-LEVEL PROGRAMS (cont'd)

G. CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION 110

H. COUNSELLING 112

I. ATTENDANCE 115

J. SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE CLIMATE 116

1. Extracurricular Activities 116
2. Impact of Program on School 117

K. TEACHERS AND STUDENTS 118

1. School M 118
2. School N 119
3. School O 120
4. School P 121
5. School Q 122
6. School R 123
7. Schools S and T 124

L. SUMMARY 126

VII CONCLUSIONS 129

A. INTRODUCTION 129

B. WHO DROPS OUT? 130

C. DOES PART-TIME WORK INFLUENCE SCHOOL LEAVING? 131

D. STUDENT EVALUATION 132

1. Impact of OSIS on Student Evaluation and Student Progress 132
2. Trends in Student Evaluation 133

E. EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS AT THE BASIC LEVEL 133

1. Basic-level Courses Programs 134
2. Student Evaluation Procedures 135
3. Counselling 135
4. Extracurricular Programming 135
5. IPRC 136

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont'd.)

Page

F. EXEMPLARY PROGRAMMING AT THE GENERAL LEVEL 136

1. Packages 136
2. Co-operative Education 137
3. Alternative and Remedial Programs 138
4. School Atmosphere 138
5. Student Evaluation Procedures 139
6. Student Services 139

G. STREAMING AND NON-STREAMING 140

H. CONCLUDING STATEMENT 141

REFERENCES 142

TABLES

		Page
TABLE 2.1:	GRADE OF STUDENTS WHEN THEY DROPPED OUT	16
TABLE 2.2:	LEVEL OF COURSES TAKEN BY DROPOUTS AT ENTRY TO HIGH SCHOOL AND TIME OF WITHDRAWAL	17
TABLE 2.3:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO TOOK TWO OR MORE WORK-RELATED COURSES IN A PARTICULAR AREA	18
TABLE 2.4:	NUMBER OF CREDITS MISSING AT TIME OF SCHOOL LEAVING	18
TABLE 2.5:	PERCENTAGE OF DROPOUTS WHO HAD A JOB SINCE OR UPON LEAVING SHCOOL	20
TABLE 2.6:	DROPOUTS' FIRST AND CURRENT JOBS	21
TABLE 2.7:	SALARY OF DROPOUTS PER HOUR	21
TABLE 2.8:	REASONS WHY UNEMPLOYED FEEL THEY HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO FIND A JOB	22
TABLE 2.9:	WILLINGNESS TO RELOCATE TO FIND A JOB	22
TABLE 2.10:	PERCENTAGE OF DROPOUTS WHO SEE A GOOD FUTURE WITH EMPLOYER	22
TABLE 2.11:	WHAT DROPOUTS LIKED LEAST ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL	23
TABLE 2.12:	REASONS GIVEN FOR DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL	23
TABLE 2.13:	COURSES WHICH HAVE HELPED DROPOUTS IN THEIR JOB(S)	24
TABLE 2.14:	REASONS WHY STUDENTS DROPPED OUT, BY NUMBER OF CREDITS MISSING	24
TABLE 3.1:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME, BY GRADE	27
TABLE 3.2:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME, BY LEVEL	27
TABLE 3.3:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME, BY GENDER	27
TABLE 3.4:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME, BY AGE	27
TABLE 3.5:	STUDENTS' TYPE OF PART-TIME WORK, BY GENDER	28
TABLE 3.6:	MAIN REASON FOR STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME	28

TABLES (cont'd.)

		Page
TABLE 3.7:	NUMBER OF EMPLOYERS BY TYPES OF FIRMS SURVEYED	29
TABLE 3.8:	WEEKLY HOURS WORKED, BY AVERAGE MARK AND LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY	33
TABLE 3.9:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AGREEING THAT PART-TIME JOB PREVENTS SOME ACTIVITIES	33
TABLE 3.10:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AGREEING THAT PART-TIME JOB NEGATIVELY AFFECTS SOME ACTIVITIES	33
TABLE 3.11:	WEEKLY HOURS WORKED, BY GENDER	34
TABLE 3.12:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO WOULD LIKE TO CONTINUE WORKING WITH THE SAME COMPANY AFTER THEY COMPLETE SCHOOL	35
TABLE 3.13:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO THINK OF QUITTING SCHOOL TO WORK FULL TIME, BY HOURS WORKED PER WEEK	35
TABLE 3.14:	CURRENT HOURLY WAGE OF STUDENT WORKERS	36
TABLE 3.15:	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO THINK OF QUITTING SCHOOL TO WORK FULL TIME	36
TABLE 4.1:	PERCENTAGE OF CREDITS FAILED IN BASIC-, GENERAL-, AND ADVANCED-LEVEL CORE COURSES (GRADES 9 AND 10) IN FIVE SCHOOLS, ONE SCHOOL BOARD	42
TABLE 4.2:	STUDENTS' AVERAGE MARKS (GRADES 11 AND UP)	42
TABLE 4.3:	AVERAGE MARK BY GRADE AND LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY	45
TABLE 5.1:	CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF BASIC-LEVEL PROGRAMS	62
TABLE 6.1:	CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF GENERAL-LEVEL PROGRAMS	97

FIGURES

		Page
FIGURE 4.1	FAILURE RATES: GRADE 9 MATHEMATICS IN 16 SCHOOLS	39
FIGURE 4.2	FAILURE RATES: GRADE 9 SCIENCE IN 16 SCHOOLS	40
FIGURE 4.3	FAILURE RATES: GRADE 9 ENGLISH IN 16 SCHOOLS	41
FIGURE 4.4	FAILURE RATES: GRADE 11 MATHEMATICS IN 16 SCHOOLS	44
FIGURE 4.5	GRADE 9 TO 11 - GENERAL-LEVEL COURSE FAILURE RATES IN 7 SCHOOLS PRE-OSIS AND OSIS	46
FIGURE 4.6	CREDIT ACCUMULATION OF STUDENTS TAKING COURSES AT THE GENERAL LEVEL IN 18 SCHOOLS (TWO PRE-OSIS COHORTS AND TWO OSIS COHORTS)	50
FIGURE 4.7	TEACHERS' EVALUATION CRITERIA	52
FIGURE 5.1	PROGRESS OF STUDENTS TAKING BASIC-LEVEL CORE COURSES IN FOUR COMPOSITE SCHOOLS (I983-87 Cohort)	63
FIGURE 5.2	PROGRESS OF STUDENTS TAKING BASIC-LEVEL CORE COURSES IN FOUR COMPOSITE SCHOOLS (1984-87 Cohort)	65
FIGURE 5.3	PROGRESS OF STUDENTS TAKING BASIC-LEVEL CORE COURSES IN THREE VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS (1983-87 Cohort)	66
FIGURE 5.4	PROGRESS OF STUDENTS TAKING BASIC-LEVEL CORE COURSES IN THREE VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS (1984-87 Cohort)	67
FIGURE 6.1	PROGRESS OF STUDENTS TAKING GENERAL-LEVEL CORE COURSES IN FOUR SCHOOLS (1983-87 Cohort)	100
FIGURE 6.2	PROGRESS OF STUDENTS TAKING GENERAL-LEVEL CORE COURSES IN FOUR SCHOOLS (1984-87 Cohort)	101
FIGURE 6.3	PROGRESS OF STUDENTS TAKING GENERAL-LEVEL CORE COURSES IN SCHOOL R (1984-87 and 1985-87 Cohorts)	103

ABSTRACT

The emphasis in this study is on programs and policies designed to improve secondary school retention rates. There were four parts to the study: (1) an analysis of credit accumulation for four cohorts and academic achievement patterns over four years in 16 schools; (2) an examination of eight exemplary programs aimed at students who take mainly General-level courses; (3) an examination of eight exemplary programs for students taking mainly Basic-level courses; and (4) an analysis of the extent to which part-time work influences school leaving. The part-time work survey was administered in 13 schools to 4,620 students in Grades 11 and above, and the telephone interview was conducted with 610 dropouts from 22 schools.

The main findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- The vast majority of dropouts were taking mainly General-level courses at the time of leaving school; the students who take mainly Basic-level courses are at particularly high risk of dropping out.

- The range of dropouts in the schools studied was from 31 to 46 percent of students taking mainly General-level courses and from 27 to 72 percent of students taking mainly Basic-level courses.

- The vast majority of the dropouts surveyed left school because they were so far behind in credit accumulation that the likelihood of graduation was too remote.

- Nearly two-thirds of senior students were working part time; 22 percent more were seeking jobs.

- Nearly 40 percent of senior students who work do so for more than 20 hours per week and this amount has an adverse effect on school achievement.

- There is little evidence that part-time work contributes to students deciding to leave school early. Over 40 percent of the dropouts were unemployed at the time of school leaving and one-third of the dropouts took up work in the part-time jobs they had at the time of school leaving. Most jobs held at the time of the interviews offered little more than minimum wage with little opportunity for career development.

- The analysis of student credit accumulation suggests a slight increase in dropout rates

occurring as a result of the implementation of OSIS.

- There is little evidence of a decrease in dropouts occurring because of more relevant programming (i.e., career-related packages of courses).

- There is some evidence that student evaluation emphasizing attendance and work habits contributes to an increase in school retention.

BASIC-LEVEL PROGRAMMING

Although there was no dramatic improvement in retention rates in the eight Basic-level exemplary programs, the improvements were substantial compared to provincial norms. Recommended course and program characteristics at the Basic-level include:

- a reversal of the previous pattern of academic failure toward success and confidence building in Grade 9;

- courses focussed on career preparation with a wide choice available;

- well-designed, closely supervised co-operative education linked to students' career interests;

- guidance departments with a full range of student services, especially special education and co-operative education; and

- extracurricular programs as alternative forms of success designed specifically to meet students' interests.

GENERAL-LEVEL PROGRAMMING

Eight schools were selected because of exemplary aspects or approaches in General-level programs. Some had only been in effect a short time and this might have been one reason no change was evident in the credit accumulation of students taking mostly General-level courses in the eight schools. Recommended course and program characteristics of the General level include:

- co-operative education for senior students that is well conceptualized in terms of career preparation and closely monitored;

- alternative programs designed to reclaim failing students;

- programs designed: (1) to enable unsuccessful students to learn basic skills in mathematics and language and (2) to have failing students upgrade and recover credits within a flexible timeframe;
- firm attendance policies;
- a positive school atmosphere that encourages students to feel a sense of belonging to the school. This occurs when there is a student-centred orientation among teachers and administrators and strong extracurricular programming; and,
- reduction in course failure rates. We found two procedures that contribute to a decline in course failure rates: (1) student evaluation approaches that emphasize the affective aspects of development rather than strictly the cognitive and (2) administrator monitoring of high failure rates.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Recently there has been increasing concern in the Ontario Ministry of Education, teacher and trustee organizations, the business community, and the general public about the number of secondary school students who leave school early and do not accumulate sufficient credits to graduate--the "dropouts." As a result, the Ministry of Education formed a liaison committee for the "Student Retention and Transition Project," in order to develop policy and support initiatives designed to reduce the secondary school dropout rate. A series of studies was commissioned, each with a specific mandate to ensure that the most critical issues would be studied in-depth without duplication of effort. This study is designed to be a component of this group of studies.

A number of areas are of concern, but here we focus mainly on the school experience of students who drop out, why they leave, where they go, and the effectiveness of programs designed to encourage students to remain in school until they graduate. The special emphasis of this study is an examination of programs, courses, evaluation policies and procedures to find those which appear to be most effective in retaining students. The report is designed to provide information on secondary school programming initiatives to Ministry of Education officials and school decision-makers that can be used as a basis for program changes.

B. BACKGROUND

In this section we discuss the characteristics of the dropout as portrayed in the literature, the influence of part-time work, prevention programs designed to retain students in school and educational reforms presently being recommended.

1. The Early School Leaver

In any discussion of the retention of students it is essential to examine the reverse side of the coin--the dropout. There is no shortage of literature examining the problem of students who leave high school before obtaining a graduation diploma. In particular, there are a large number of American studies available which have analyzed many aspects of this phenomenon, from those conducted by school boards to national studies. The Canadian literature available is not quite as comprehensive, and focusses mainly on local or provincial situations. This is understandable as education in Canada is a provincial matter. In a few studies comparative data across Canada has been analyzed, but often with little success. In the past few years, however, declining enrolments have led to an increased interest in the dropout population and more effective studies have been carried out.

What is the case to be made for encouraging more students to remain in school? In our many surveys of young people in Ontario we have asked of secondary school students, "Why do you remain in school?" Their virtually unanimous response is "so that I can get a better job". Often the response is prefaced with "to get an education" before being followed by "to get a better job". There are always a few students who appear to value education for itself, but they represent a very small minority. If we view secondary education, as most students seem to, in these instrumental terms it helps us understand how students are motivated. Through the years of secondary school, students are sorted in accordance with post-secondary education opportunities. Those who receive the highest marks may go on to university; those in the next group may go to the colleges; those on the bottom rung go directly to the labour market. For some students there is little payoff in economic terms for graduation. Although there are many studies which show that graduates earn more money than dropouts, this occurs in great part because the graduation diploma is used to screen applicants for jobs. If a greater proportion of students graduate from secondary school, then the value of the diploma is debased and differentiation for employment decisions must be based on higher educational attainment. It is difficult to motivate those students who are denied access to higher education, and withdrawal from school may be quite appropriate for some students. A number of American and British researchers make this point well. Oakes (1985) summarizes this position:

> The more radical critics of schooling--and most of the cultural-reproduction theorists are among this group--are pessimistic about the possibility of educational reform. They believe that without major shifts in the distribution of economic and political power school reform toward equity is impossible since the elite groups who now control schools would never permit these reforms to occur. We can conclude that the cultural-reproduction theorists are correct in their description of the problem. (p. 204)

That is to say, the issue of dropping out is far more closely related to the nature of the political economy, which requires some to be less successful than others, than it is to the motivation of young people. In any case, the advantages to students of remaining in school are certainly muddied by the requirement for secondary schools to differentiate among students and the evaluation process that this inevitably requires. We have chosen to examine closely the implications of evaluation policies and procedures on early school leaving.

It will be seen in our analysis of achievement in Ontario secondary schools that compromises in student evaluation procedures begin to emerge as pressures to retain students increase. Without a coercive element it may be difficult to retain more students without creating more success for students through a reduction in expectations. A highly significant factor in Ontario schools which distinguishes those who stay in high school until graduation from those who leave early is the level at which they take their courses. King and Hughes (1985) have shown that students who enter Grade 9 taking courses at the Advanced level have a 12 percent dropout rate; those who begin taking courses at the General level, a 62 percent rate, and those at the Basic level, a 79 percent dropout rate. Similar findings have been documented in other geographical areas (Pawlovich, 1985).

There are several questions which must be asked in relation to the desire to retain all students through to graduation. Some of these are: Who are the students who leave school before graduating? Why do they leave early? Is it economically and socially feasible for all students to graduate?

a) Who Are the Dropouts?

Many dropout-prevention programs have been designed using information obtained from student surveys. We ask students why they leave and then we describe their demographic characteristics. We do this (1) even though we cannot change their background, and (2) since dropping out is considered a negative act in our society, students must develop a reasonable or positive explanation for it. One can find a comprehensive list of dropout characteristics in numerous studies (Cheng and Ziegler, 1986; Grossnickle, 1986; Dropout Retrieval Project, Baltimore, 1986; King and White, 1974). Those characteristics most strongly correlated with dropping out of school before graduating are as follows: a dislike of school, poor grades, failure in courses, erratic attendance, pregnancy, discipline problems resulting in suspension or expulsion, low socio-economic status, no father in the home, and frequent changing of schools. Sikes and Hildebrand (1986) categorize these characteristicss in two ways, those over which the student has some control and those over which he or she has none. It is assumed that the student has some responsibility for the first six listed, but has not, to any extent much control over the last three.

There are many other findings related to dropouts--more boys (approximately 60%), for example, leave school early than girls (40%; Wright, 1985; Lambton County Board of Education, 1977). These figures have remained fairly constant for some time. Figures from High School and Beyond --an annual statistical survey sponsored by the National Centre for Education Statistics, Washington--have shown the highest dropout rates over many years to occur in Grades 10 and 11.

The percentage of dropouts in Grades 10 and 11 account for 50 to 60 percent of the total dropouts from a single cohort. Recent studies in Ontario reveal similar figures (Karp, Goldfarb Consultants, 1988, 61%; Sullivan, Decima Research, 1988, 60%). This is a substantial rise from 1974/75 when the figures in Ontario were 54 percent for Grades 10 and 11 and 17 percent for Grade 9 (Watson and McElroy, 1976). The Grade 9 rate has dropped to between eight and ten percent (Decima, 1988; Goldfarb, 1988). This may be a result of fewer students being held back in elementary school, thus not having reached 16 by Grade 9. The ages of dropping out are highest at 16 and 17, but those who drop out at 18 or 19 are often students who are well behind in their credit accumulation, making their chances of graduation quite remote.

b) Why Do Students Leave School Early?

In contrast with the Canadian literature on dropouts, the American researchers have focussed more on the issue of failure. California Dropouts: A Status Report (1986) cited a literature review for the Association of California Urban School Districts (1985) which listed 20 known characteristics of dropouts; the State Department of Education identified 24. It quoted a task force report stating that "based on the practical long-term experiences of their districts, [they] were unanimous in their agreement with the literature - the single most outstanding feature of a dropout is a history of failure in school" (p.3). However, the question of whether this is a primary or a secondary characteristic is often raised. Many authors feel that dissatisfaction with and dislike of school lead to poor performance. These factors often surface very early in a student's school experience. Home background, language problems, and shyness are only a few of the attributes the five- or six-year-old brings with him or her on entering school. Add these to the unfamiliar surroundings of the classroom and some negative experiences, and problems can arise. If his adjustment is not immediately acceptable in terms of the school's expectations, a very young child can be labelled as a slow-learner or a discipline problem very early. Soon he is on the institutional merry-go-round--he hates school, therefore he does poorly academically, therefore he hates school, therefore he gets into trouble, therefore he hates school. When students enter secondary school from this milieu, the problems intensify.

Socio-economic status is frequently cited as a factor causing students to leave school early. It is often linked with other elements such as no father in the home, moving frequently and low academic achievement of parents. This final point becomes quite relevant when one considers the more recent recommendation that the schools must make parents more aware of and involve them more in the student's school progress in order to encourage the student to remain in school (Pawlovich, 1985; Webb, 1987).

How can we better understand how students manage a process that requires some to be more successful than others--a process that guarantees some students less status than others? It's easy to see how adolescent counter-systems develop in schools based on values different from those espoused by the schools. In our interviews with students taking mainly Basic-level courses for The Adolescent Experience (1986), we found that they rarely describe themselves in terms related to their school achievement, while those taking courses at the Advanced level invariably did.

> I am generally a happy person around friends and family but at school I think I'm pretty shy and quiet.
> Grade 10 boy taking Basic-level courses. (p. 41)
>
> I am short. I have dark brown hair and green eyes. I can get upset very fast.
> Grade 10 girl taking Basic-level courses. (p. 41)
>
> [I like] the self-dependency which I have taught myself; my involvement with school; my organizational abilities; my determinedness to complete what I have started.
> Grade 12 boy taking Advanced-level courses. (p. 21)
>
> I like the way I look. I enjoy being good at schoolwork. I like all of my friends and going to school.
> Grade 12 girl taking Advanced-level courses. (p. 21)

Assuming we can identify the students who leave school early, it is equally important to know why they drop out from their point of view and that of others involved. Students have been asked why they leave school early as have their parents, teachers, and administrative personnel. Tidwell (1985) reports that students' reasons for dropping out of school were their poor grades, family reasons, work responsibility, and problems with teachers. Their responses to open-ended questions confirmed these points with comments that school is boring, they were behind in the number of credits they had accumulated and could not graduate, and that their teachers were unfair. Similar findings have been described elsewhere (Grossnickle, 1986). Grossnickle also stated that the "primary reason that students leave school early is that they are desperately trying to escape failure" (p.10). In A Study of Student Dropouts in the Los Angeles Unified School District (1985) administrators, parents, and teachers gave the following as the main reasons students leave school: poor grades, pregnancy, family problems, age, and work responsibility. The reasons given reflect similar points of view.

c) What Conditions Would Help to Keep Dropouts in School?

If we can describe the students who may be potential dropouts, and we have some answers for why most drop out, we should ask if there are any conditions under which they would remain in school.

There seem to be relatively few studies which have approached this question directly, but it may be inferred that, if the conditions in schools were opposite to those the students give for leaving, perhaps more dropouts would remain and graduate. That is, if they achieved more success, felt more satisfied that their courses had some relevance to their future, and that family problems could be ameliorated, then more students should remain. It would appear that programs offered to dropouts do address some of these problems and have achieved some success in doing so. In a New York program offered to dropouts and potential dropouts in 1984 (Operation Success), it was found that at the end of the first year 93 percent of the participants were still enrolled or had graduated. Support services to dropouts, and programs which developed skills and self-awareness were part of the overall offerings. Other specially designed programs have achieved similar results.

d) Career Opportunities for Graduates and Non-graduates

We must ask ourselves, as educators, why we want to retain students to graduation. Are the advantages for the student who obtains a Grade 12 graduation diploma such that it is a major handicap if one does not? Stern et al. (1986) speak of the high school diploma having "some value purely as a credential" (p.18). Those who have attained this diploma are assumed to be more competent than those who have not. This consideration was corroborated by King (1986).

Warren and King (1979) examined both graduates and dropouts of two cohorts of students who had entered Grade 9 in 1973 and 1974 taking their courses at the General level and had proceeded from school to the work force. It was found that more dropouts than graduates (29% vs. 17%) were unemployed at the time of the research. For those who had worked there was little differentiation between the types of jobs they held; almost all were relatively low level with little opportunity for advancement. Large numbers of those employed were in their second or third job. This was especially true of the dropout population (80%). It would appear, then, that there is some advantage in having a graduation diploma in providing greater access to jobs, but little in career terms. Sixty percent of the employers in the Warren and King study indicated that the jobs available for those they were hiring required Grade 10 education or less. Hall and Carlton (1977) found similar results. There still seems to be a fairly large supply of these low-level jobs--fast food restaurants, gas bars, supermarkets, department stores etc., but there is very little opportunity for advancement in many of the jobs in these areas and, also, the trend seems to be that these jobs are only available on a part-time basis.

When considering full-time employees, employers in the 1980s indicate that they have higher expectations; they say they want more communication and mathematical skills from them, and some training in computer skills is desirable (Warren and King, 1988). Stern et al. (1986) relate data which indicate that in 1982, 45 percent of female graduates worked in an office/clerical setting compared with only nine percent of the female dropouts. Although not as pronounced a difference, 18 percent of the male graduates were in skilled trades compared with five percent of the male dropouts. It is clear that in a very short period of time, educational expectations have changed in the work force.

2. Part-time Work

Greater numbers of young people are working part time. To what extent is this part-time work influencing their lives and their social and educational experiences in school? A major thrust of this study was to examine this student part-time work phenomenon in some depth.

Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) stated that two-thirds of American 16- and 17-year-old students were working during the 1978-79 school year. In a passing reference they said that the figures for other countries were much lower--in Canada it was about 37 percent. If that figure was accurate there has been a dramatic change in a very few years. Recent figures for Ontario youth indicate that 67 percent now have part-time jobs while in high school (King, 1986). However, there is little evidence linking a part-time job with dropping out of school unless the student is working excessively. There is some question, though, whether these are the students who have less interest in schooling and tend to increase their work hours: "... while there is little evidence to suggest that students who do less well in school are more likely to become workers during the high school years, there is indirect evidence that they work longer hours than other youngsters" (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986, p.118). One cannot really differentiate among the students who work part time. All types of students are represented: good, poor, those from high income families and those from low, male and female, two-parent homes, single-parent homes (King, 1986). There appears to be minimum incentive relating to economic necessity.

The impact of part-time work on achievement in school appears to be insignificant except for those who work long hours--in excess of 15 hours per week (King, 1986; Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986). It also seems reasonable to expect that those who work more than 15 hours have little time to take part in the school's extracurricular activities. King reports that approximately 56 percent of those students are involved in at least one activity compared with 69 percent of students who work four hours or less (p.79).

Whether there is any influence on students with part-time jobs to leave school early has not been clearly answered. There is some support for the hypothesis that those who work longer hours are more likely to drop out of school, especially 10th grade males and 11th grade females working more than 20 hours per week (D'Amico, 1984). Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) examined the issue of how work experience during high school affects the transition to adulthood and concluded that: "Youngsters who become highly absorbed in working appear to invest less in obtaining a good high-school education and appear to obtain weaker educational credentials, in terms of a high-school diploma or the attainment of post-secondary education" (p.155).

3. Prevention Programs

There is a wealth of literature describing innumerable prevention programs for the students who appear to be potential dropouts and retrieval programs for those who have already dropped out. Most which are offered at the secondary level seem to concentrate on vocational and co-operative education. The assumptions are, that by placing these students into programs where they can feel they are learning something directly useful for the workplace, they will be more inclined to remain until graduation. With the expansion of co-operative education programs, the opportunity to work as part of their school program has become very attractive to some students. There are some concerns with both of these types of programs in Ontario (King and Hughes, 1985). For example, very often the co-operative education experience takes place in low-skill jobs and does little to prepare the student for the work force. Vocational preparation is available to all levels of students in many schools, but it does not seem to have the programmatic elements which would encourage students taking mainly Advanced- and General-level courses to participate fully.

There are many dropout prevention programs being introduced in the elementary schools at the present time. These involve early identification, increased interaction with teachers/counsellors, small group instruction, special attention to transition from elementary to high school, and more support services for the student.

We examined the characteristics of several preventative programs instituted across Ontario (Ministry of Education, 1988) and found that there was little change in the substance of courses and programs being offered: the emphasis is to provide support for students in ensuring that they complete the required number of compulsory courses in addition to credits allowed for a work-experience component. Providing individualized attention with personalized timetabling and improved counselling do produce some positive results and the experience of co-operative education often eases the transition into the work force, but many of these students are not coping any more successfully with the academic courses they must take. Forgiving evaluation policies seem to be the solution for successful completion of these courses. Nevertheless, more attention to programs which incorporate academic courses specific to the vocational components may bear more productive fruit in the long run.

Dropouts typically indicate that their teachers cared little for them personally (Karp, Goldfarb, 1988; Sullivan, Decima, I988). Duhan and Mouton (1985) state there is "... overwhelming evidence of a need for teachers to develop an improved level of sensitivity towards students' emotional needs as well as academic needs". Teacher sensitivity to students' needs appears to be a critical factor in the retention of students.

4. Educational Reforms

A concern for the future of those students likely to drop out of school often precipitates educational reforms. There has been a push for several years in the United States to adopt "higher standards" and compulsory testing (Mizell, 1987). It is suggested that more compulsory academic courses, longer school day/year, and more homework will achieve these "higher standards". This movement has raised predictable concerns:

> Considerable controversy currently exists over the likely fate of students at-risk who drop out during this period of educational reform. One view is ... higher graduation requirements and more rigorous curriculum and the concomitant reductions in remedial, vocational, and nonacademic curricular offerings, will force more and more of the academically less successful, marginally involved students out of school altogether. (California Dropouts, A Status Report, 1986)

Also Sikes and Hildebrand (1986) state: "... one aspect of the dropout problem is the possible danger to at-risk students of the new movements toward educational reform." This theme is continued in the High Cost of High Standards. School Reform and Dropouts (McDill et al., 1985) which uses the phrase "quality or equality education" to reflect the concern about this movement. The concept of higher standards is strongly supported and recommended in the recent Ontario report by George Radwanski, Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education and the Issue of Dropouts, 1987. With the suggestions that there be more standardized testing and the elimination of streaming, concerns similar to those expressed in the American literature concerning "at-risk students" should soon become quite prevalent in Ontario.

C. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following research questions have been used to guide the methodology of the study.

1) What are current and projected effects of OSIS on dropout rates? The dropout pattern

that has precipitated the political concern is based on HS1 which required only 27 credits for a diploma. OSIS increases the number of courses required to 30 and increases the number of non-optional courses from 9 to 16.

2) Does part-time work encourage students to leave school?
   a) Who are the students involved in part-time work and why do they do it?
   b) What type of part-time work do students become involved in and what are their career prospects?
   c) Does an increase in hours of part-time work correspond to a decrease school performance or is it merely a symptom of school failure and consequent alienation?

3) Does part-time work influence school achievement and involvement in extra-curricular activities?

4) How do teachers evaluate students and what are the forces which influence evaluation procedures; what is the effect of teachers'evaluation procedures on retaining students in school?

5) Do the eight exemplary programs for the Basic level that were studied show potential for reducing the dropout rate?

6) Do the eight exemplary programs for the General level that were studied show potential for reducing the dropout rate?

D. METHODOLOGY

1. Definitions

a) Dropouts

For purposes of this study dropouts are students who enter secondary school in Grade 9, but then leave school before attaining a graduation diploma (SSGD or OSSD) While it is true that some of these students will come back to school at a later point and complete a diploma, for purposes of this analysis they will still be classified as dropouts. Students who complete a Certificate of Education (14 credits) and leave school are classified here as dropouts. Some educators might justifiably contest this dropout classification. They feel a Certificate of Education is a realistic goal for students who take their courses at the Basic level.

b) Student Categories

In Ontario secondary schools students are offered courses at the Advanced, General or Basic level of difficulty. Students are encouraged to take combinations of courses that are consistent with their abilities, aptitudes and career aspirations. While this approach to course selection does result in patterns of course selection that are nearly homogeneous as to level of difficulty, there are students who take a mix of levels of difficulty. As a result, for all intents and purposes, we identify four groupings of students: those that take the majority of their courses at the Basic, General or Advanced levels and those that take a mix of Advanced- and General-level courses. Students who take most of their courses at the Advanced and Basic levels often take courses such as physical education, visual arts, business education, and technological studies designated only at the General level, which confounds the situation further.

Since the vast majority of dropouts come from those groups of students who take most of their courses at the General and Basic levels, these students receive the greatest amount of attention in the analysis.

2. Data Collection

The study focussed on two main areas: (1) programs and courses, and (2) evaluation policies and procedures. There were four parts to the study: (1) the influence of credit accumulation and academic course achievement patterns on school retention; (2) exemplary programs for students who take mainly General-level courses; (3) exemplary programs for students who take mainly Basic-level courses; and, (4) the influence of part-time employment on school leaving.

a) Part I: Influence of Credit Accumulation and Academic Achievement Patterns on School Retention

Twenty composite schools from four school boards were targetted for this segment of the analysis. The boards were chosen because they were able to produce, either by computer or manually, data on credit accumulation by students, and course enrolments and success rates in courses. The boards are located in different geographic regions of the province and are varied in size as are the schools.

Four cohorts of students were to be selected in each of the 20 schools: those who enrolled in Grade 9 in 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985. The first two cohorts provide a picture of the pre-OSIS period and the next two, the first stages of the implementation of OSIS. Credit accumulation for each student in the cohorts and school withdrawal data were obtained, as well as success rates by course. The statistical analysis was designed to allow us to compare pre-OSIS and post-OSIS credit accumulation and consider the potential impact of OSIS on student progress toward graduation and school retention.

b) Part II: Exemplary Programs for Students Who Take Mainly General-Level Courses

Part II of the study was based on an examination of eight exemplary programs aimed specifically at students who take mainly General-level courses. They were identified through consultation with ministry officials, senior administrators and consultants at the board level, principals and our 1987 research on 200 secondary schools (King, Warren and Peart, 1988). Several boards of education were in the process of setting up programs, but they were not at the stage where they could be included in this study.

In each school, two researchers spent from two to four days (depending on the size of the program) interviewing the principal and at least one vice-principal, six to ten teachers and a sample of students. The students were usually interviewed in groups, although in the small programs, they were seen individually. The interviews with administrators focussed on the organization of the program, similarities and differences between it and regular programs, and their reasons for adopting their particular program. Interviews with teachers included questions about their expectations of the students in the program, how their teaching methods varied from the usual classroom, evaluation methods and overall impressions of the success of the program in retaining students. Students were asked how they entered the program (i.e., voluntarily or on the suggestion of others), their impressions of how it differed from the regular program, their sense of accomplishment in the program and whether they expected to complete their graduation requirements.

During their visit the researchers also collected written statements regarding evaluation and attendance policies, goals and priorities of the school, school calendars and other relevant material. Arrangements were made in five schools for a secretary to record the credit accumulation for two cohorts (including dropouts) of students enrolled in Grade 9 in 1983 and 1984, list course enrolments and success rates for the 1985-86 and 1986-87 school years, and photocopy or otherwise record information from a sample of Grade 12 student transcripts for the last two years. There were some variations from the above pattern in some schools which will be described in the body of the report. Two schools in which only a small number of students were involved in the program and one school which was just beginning its second year of specialization were not included in the credit accumulation analysis.

c) Part III: Exemplary Programs for Students Who Take Mainly Basic-Level Courses

Part III of the study followed the same procedures as Part II with the difference that Basic-level programming was examined. The eight schools chosen involved four vocational schools and four composite schools with Basic-level programs, all of which had reputations for being effective in retaining students.

d) Part IV: The Influence of Part-time Employment on School Leaving

There were two aims in Part IV of the study: 1) to assess the extent of part-time jobs held by senior secondary school students and the impact of these jobs on their school experience and 2) to develop a profile of dropouts which included their experiences in school and in the job market.

A survey on part-time jobs was administered in 13 schools to 4,620 students in Grades 11 and above. Six of the schools were also in Part II of the study and three were in Part I. The remaining four schools were selected to represent other geographic regions of the province.

These 13 schools in which the part-time survey was administered were also asked to co-operate in our efforts to conduct a telephone interview with dropouts from the 1985-86 and 1986-87 school years. The target was 1,000 dropout interviews. To acquire this information the schools were asked to prepare a list of dropouts with their last-known telephone number and give it to an individual whom the principal identified--a part-time, retired or supply teacher--who would then carry out the telephone interviews. A letter was obtained from the Legislation Branch of the Ministry of Education approving the method of collecting information from the dropouts to alleviate any concerns on the part of school administrators. The success rates in obtaining a sufficient number of interviews in these 13 schools was low and nine additional schools were chosen to increase our total number of respondents to 610.

3. Data Analysis and Summary

In Part I, three school boards supplied computer tapes for analysis of credit accumulation and success rates, and one school board manually recorded the information. Only 18 composite schools were included and some of the data were incomplete. The credit accumulation for four cohorts was summarized, as were the dropout data. The available data were then aggregated for the 18 schools in order to compare pre-and early-OSIS credit accumulation.

Upon completion of the visits to schools in Parts II and III, each pair of researchers summarized the interview responses and wrote a detailed description of the school, its program and students', teachers', and administrators' perceptions. Written materials, such as policy documents, calendars, handbooks and newsletters were included as part of the summary. Credit accumulation for selected programs was analyzed separately.

The open-ended questions were coded from the questionnaire, **Student Survey on Part-time Employment**, administered to senior students; all data were entered and computer printouts obtained. From these data, tables and figures were developed which have been incorporated into the text. The telephone interviews with dropouts were analyzed in the same manner.

All the above information has been drawn together and summarized in order to judge its impact on the overall retention of students in these schools and to provide information to other interested schools.

E. ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

In Chapter II we describe the dropouts and indicate why they leave school and how they adapt to the world outside school. Chapter III pays extensive attention to the many aspects of part-time work, outlining the kinds of work students perform, their reasons for working, impact on students' schoolwork and influence on school-leaving. Chapter IV assesses students' achievement in terms of course success rates and credit accumulation patterns, and considers the implications of alternative approaches to student evaluation. In Chapter V, the exemplary Basic-level programs are described in detail and their most effective features identified. Chapter VI provides a similar analysis with regard to the General-level programs. Chapter VII summarizes the findings and offers some suggestions for future directions.

CHAPTER II
THE EARLY LEAVER

A. INTRODUCTION

Dropping out of school is a major decision for young people. There are many pressures to remain in school including constant reaffirmation of the importance of attaining a graduation diploma. Therefore, the event itself has to be seen as at least somewhat traumatic and probably accompanied by a measure of stigma. It is our impression that dropping out is a culmination of a long-term disaffection with school and those immediate events surrounding the actual decision are far less important than the cumulative effect of a dropout's school experience.

The research we have reviewed in Chapter I and our own survey of students' school experiences lead us to believe that dropping out of school is closely linked to the dropout's lack of academic achievement. The vast majority of students who leave early do so because the likelihood of successful completion of a diploma is not great and, on balance, the search for a job is more viable. The process of dropping out begins in elementary school and in the first stages of secondary school. It is part of a withdrawal from all aspects of school life ranging from homework to those friendships that are part of their association with the school. It must not be seen as only a break with the academic aspects of the school, but also with the social life that can be so rewarding to young people. We rejected the dropouts' simplistic explanations of school leaving such as disliking particular teachers and boring classes and focussed on academic achievement and course and program relevance.

The first level of analysis involved comparing the personal background characteristics and academic achievement of dropouts with those of students who remain in school. Secondly, we look at the nature of the transition from school to work or unemployment to try to determine if, for some reason or reasons, employment opportunities are so attractive students feel they must leave school. This includes a discussion of dropouts' perceptions of the jobs they do take. Thirdly, we look at the dropouts' views of the efforts by schools to retain them.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DROPOUTS

Although many factors that influence students' achievements in school are related to things that cannot be changed (e.g., gender and family socio-economic status), it is still possible to provide in-school support to counter these influences. For example, the efforts that have been made to encourage more girls to take science and mathematics have had positive effects. The male/female pattern of school withdrawal is an interesting phenomenon and is part of a larger social trend that is beginning to appear in the school system. Fifteen years ago girls did well in school but were more inclined to leave after Grade 12 than were boys. Boys were more likely to be enrolled in Grade 13 and far more likely to go on to post-secondary education. This pattern has changed. For many years girls have been more likely to be enrolled in university-bound courses and boys overrepresented in Basic- and General-level courses. Now, boys and girls are equally likely to go on to post-secondary education. This is a trend that has not peaked. Girls obtain higher marks in secondary school than boys, have better work habits, and are more likely to be in Advanced courses, as their aspirations begin to more closely parallel their aptitudes and abilities. They expect to participate fully in the economy. We would expect to find more boys dropping out than girls and this is the case in this analysis: of the dropouts in this study 56 percent were males and 44 percent, females. (It must be remembered that more boys than girls are born and this two to three percent differential must be taken into account in any comparison.)

Table 2.1 presents the distribution of dropouts in our survey by grade. The majority drop out in their senior years in school although a substantial proportion (over one-fifth) drop out in Grade 10. This is consistent with the information obtained in both the Decima and Goldfarb studies (Sullivan; Karp, 1988). Students who take courses at the Basic level tend to drop out at or near their sixteenth birthday, usually corresponding to Grade 10. It appears from this pattern and from our discussions with these students that dropping out has long been contemplated. Attaining the age of sixteen provides an official release from a kind of purgatory. For students taking courses at the General and Advanced levels, dropping out is more closely related to achievement in secondary school.

TABLE 2.1: GRADE OF STUDENTS WHEN THEY DROPPED OUT (n=610)

GRADE	%
9	8
10	22
11	35
12	34

In the past, we found dropouts were substantially more likely to be students taking their courses at the Basic- and General-levels of difficulty. In fact, the best predictor of school leaving was the level at which the courses were taken. Table 2.2 clearly illustrates that the majority of students who leave take their courses mainly at the General level of difficulty. While it is true that a great proportion of students whose courses are at the General-level drop out, it is also true that a much larger proportion of students take most of their courses at the General level in comparison with those at the Basic level (31% General, 7% Basic). Table 2.2 also illustrates the general pattern of students shifting from Advanced to General level.

TABLE 2.2: LEVEL OF COURSES TAKEN BY DROPOUTS AT ENTRY TO HIGH SCHOOL AND TIME OF WITHDRAWAL*

	% OF STUDENTS	
LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY	ENTERING GRADE 9	DROPPING OUT
Advanced	22	12
General	66	75
Basic	8	7

*Does not include students taking Advanced/General or General/Basic mix of courses.

Our previous research on dropouts indicated that their course selection in senior grades tended to be influenced by two main factors: (1) the requirement to repeat failed courses in key areas such as mathematics, science, and English in Grades 9 and 10; and (2) the tendency to seek courses that are easiest to complete successfully. This is consistent with the widespread feeling of students taking mainly General-level courses that the diploma is more important than the credits that comprise it, and that the marks obtained in courses are less important than the successful completion of a credit.

Table 2.3 was designed to show to what extent the students were taking work-related sequences of courses in the technological studies, business, or service areas. We used two courses as representative of minimum preparation for work. As can be seen, a substantial number of students take two technological studies courses prior to school leaving. It appears that students who take two or more courses in technological studies are more likely to drop out in comparison with those who take less than two or who take business education courses. It appears that the decision to take a substantial number of courses in technological studies often occurs after a pattern of failing academic courses has begun which then segue into the transition to school leaving.

TABLE 2.3: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO TOOK TWO OR MORE WORK-RELATED COURSES IN A PARTICULAR AREA

COURSE	%
Technological Studies	43
Business	28
Services	3

Table 2.4 presents a summary of the number of credits each dropout is missing at the time of school leaving. If, for example, a student left at the end of Grade 10 having successfully completed 14 credits, the student would be considered to be behind two credits at the time of school leaving. It is this table that provides the best explanation for the actual decision students make to leave school without completing sufficient courses for a graduation diploma.

TABLE 2.4: NUMBER OF CREDITS MISSING AT TIME OF SCHOOL LEAVING

CREDITS	% OF STUDENTS
0	8
1-3	16
4-5	19
6-7	17
8-9	11
10+	29

The vast majority of school-leavers are far behind their peers in accumulating the necessary credits for graduation. Forty percent of them are behind eight or more credits; over one-half are behind at least six credits. At the time of school leaving these students see very little hope of completing the diploma requirements partly because of the make-up time that would be required, but also because of a tradition of failure. To remain in school any longer simply does not make any sense. For these students, to successfully graduate would require a repetition of all those credits lost, taken in exactly the same fashion as they had experienced them before and, in addition, to obtain the rest of the credits required for a diploma. Secondary schools in this province typically do not provide opportunities for students to upgrade their knowledge and skills, especially by means of individualized learning methods.

However, what can also be seen from Table 2.4 is that eight percent of students leave even though they had been successful in all the courses they had undertaken. We attempted to determine why such apparently successful students chose to leave school. They tended to fall into the following categories: (1) students taking Basic-level courses who have a long tradition in this province of leaving on or about their 16th birthday; (2) pregnant girls; (3) students from homes with ethnic or religious values that tend to discourage remaining in school after the age of 16; and (4) students who leave to join the family business, such as a farm or small store.

There have been many studies that have employed the approach of asking students why they left school and used the dropouts' responses as a basis for educational interventions. From our previous research we have concluded that the process of dropping out of secondary school is rarely viewed positively by the individual or by society. Therefore, the students who drop out must provide an explanation that makes the decision acceptable. We asked students why they dropped out and the following is a representative sample of their responses. We have also included the number of credits they were behind at the time of school leaving.

> I got bored with school. I just didn't want to go anymore. (-11 credits)
>
> I was skipping classes, getting bored and decided to work full time. (-11 credits)
>
> I was sick of school. (-12 credits)
>
> I wasn't getting anywhere. I wanted to work. (-13 credits)
>
> School isn't my style. I couldn't concentrate on the academic subjects. (-9 credits)
>
> ... conflict with part-time job. School suffered. (-15 credits)
>
> ... didn't like the routine ... 'goofed around'.... (-18 credits)
>
> ... lost interest in learning. (-14 credits)

Although it is true that a small percentage said they left because they were failing, the majority provided a socially acceptable response to the question of why they left school. Typically, we have the situation of students saying they were bored with school and were 12 credits behind. Boredom is not the reason these students left school, although it could have led to a lack of motivation that contributed to failing grades. A student who is lagging behind his or her peers cannot be saved by relevant courses; it is simply too late; therefore, it is very important to consider changes in student evaluation policies, credit requirements and the basic structure of the credit system in order to influence students to remain in school.

To summarize, dropouts are far more likely to be enrolled in General- and Basic-level courses than Advanced-level ones. They are likely to be substantially behind in credits required for graduation. They are more likely to be male: this is in part because more males than females are enrolled in General- and Basic-level courses.

C. TRANSITION TO WORK

A number of questions in the telephone interview with dropouts were designed to determine the influence of the economy (i.e., job opportunities) on the process of school leaving. We asked these dropouts who had been out of school for up to two years the kind of work they had undertaken immediately after leaving school and the hourly rates of pay they received. Table 2.5 indicates over 90 percent of the dropouts had worked since leaving school, but only 61 percent had a job immediately upon leaving school. Therefore, for at least 39 percent, the attraction of a job was not a significant factor in leaving school. To date, 30 percent have had three or more jobs and nearly two-thirds have had at least two.

TABLE 2.5: PERCENTAGE OF DROPOUTS WHO HAD A JOB SINCE OR UPON LEAVING SCHOOL

	%
Worked since leaving school	92
Had a job upon leaving school	61

Table 2.6 provides a breakdown of the dropouts' first and current jobs. Of those who worked during their last year in high school (n = 385), about one-half (187) got a job with the same employer. This means that almost one-third of all the dropouts (n = 610) took up full-time work that they were already doing.

TABLE 2.6: DROPOUTS' FIRST AND CURRENT JOBS

	% RESPONDENTS	
	1ST JOB	CURRENT JOB
Fast food	9	5
Gas station	7	4
Restaurant	10	7
Supermarket	5	3
Cleaning/janitorial	4	2
Small retail store	5	3
Large retail store	6	5
Construction/carpentry	6	5
Babysitting/daycare	3	2
Convenience store	3	1
Recreation program	1	1
Skilled technical trades (i.e., welder, plumber, mechanic)	3	3
Farm	2	1
Factory	11	9
Secretarial/clerical	2	2
Futures	1	0
Other (i.e., motel/hotel, warehouse, hair salon, driver/mover, hospital, security guard)	15	14
Unemployed	8	34

Table 2.7 shows the starting salaries of dropouts were very similar to the salaries received by part-time student workers (see Chapter III); their current salaries show some upward movement. Research has found that dropouts quickly reach their maximum salary level. When the dropouts were in school and could spend most or all of their money on personal items, what they make would seem like a great deal of money. But when the same amount of money has to be used for transportation, accommodation, and food costs, it can easily be seen that we are talking about poverty levels of income.

TABLE 2.7: SALARY OF DROPOUTS PER HOUR

	% RESPONDENTS	
RATE PER HOUR	STARTING	CURRENT
$5.00 or less	60	30
5.01 - 6.00	17	17
6.01 - 7.00	8	12
7.01 - 8.00	8	13
8.01 or more	7	28

Therefore, it cannot be said that the majority of young people leave secondary school because the job opportunities presented to them are more advantageous than those they would have obtained if they had remained in school. There are exceptions to this: young people may leave school for high salaries, for example, in factories and supermarkets. However, there is very little evidence to support the contention that the improved economy has encouraged substantial numbers of young people to leave school. Almost one-quarter of unemployed dropouts feel they are unable to get a job because there are no jobs available (Table 2.8). Almost half of the unemployed say they would relocate to get a job (Table 2.9).

TABLE 2.8: REASONS WHY UNEMPLOYED FEEL THEY HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO FIND A JOB (n=185)

REASON	%
No experience	32
No education	17
Won't take just anything	16
No jobs available	23
Do not know	9
Other (e.g., no transportation, poor appearance)	4

TABLE 2.9: WILLINGNESS TO RELOCATE TO FIND A JOB

	%
Yes	46
No	37
Maybe/Do not know	16

Perhaps on balance, the jobs they currently hold seem to be satisfying with the most important advantage being the opportunity to meet people. Just over half of the young people see a good future with their current employer, that is, opportunities for advancement, increased job responsibilities and salary (Table 2.10).

TABLE 2.10: PERCENTAGE OF DROPOUTS WHO SEE A GOOD FUTURE WITH EMPLOYER

	%
Yes	54
No	46

D. DROPOUTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SCHOOL EXPERIENCES

We have already shown that the primary reason for early school leaving is a lack of academic success and that it occurs more for students who take mainly General- or Basic-level courses. When we asked the students what they liked least about high school, a major concern was the lack of relevance of the courses they were taking: 39 percent expressed this view (Table 2.11). But they were also concerned about the attitude of some of their teachers and their relationship with them. Few indicated that their lack of success was the reason they left school.

TABLE 2.11: WHAT DROPOUTS LIKED LEAST ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL

	% RESPONDENTS	
	1ST	2ND
Lack of course relevance/did not like courses	33	6
Relationship with teachers/administrators	22	14
Difficulty of courses	8	0
Atmosphere	10	5
No friends	5	2
Disliked everything	3	0

Table 2.12 has to be viewed in terms of the perceptions noted above. It is not surprising that a young person is bored with school if he or she has failed more than 10 credits. The question is: Do they become bored after they find they are failing or were they bored and lost interest in their courses to the extent that they failed?

TABLE 2.12: REASONS GIVEN FOR DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

	% RESPONDENTS
To take/get a job	33
Bored with school	26
Family/personal problems	13
Attendance/behind in credits	8
Dislike level of difficulty	5
Could not get "right" courses/did not like courses	5
Teachers' strike	4
Pregnancy/marriage	4
Age (i.e., too old for school)	3

More than half (53%) said they took no high school courses that they had found helpful in their jobs since leaving school. The courses that were mentioned most often by the remaining 47 percent were mathematics (34%), auto shop (19%), and English (15%) (Table 2.13). Most of the other courses mentioned had a specific job-related component.

TABLE 2.13: COURSES WHICH HAVE HELPED DROPOUTS IN THEIR JOB(S)

COURSE	%	COURSE	%
Mathematics	34	Physical Education	2
Auto Shop	19	Sheet Metal	2
English	15	Computers	1
Typing	8	Construction	1
Accounting	3	Family Studies	1
Carpentry	3	French/Italian	1
Drafting	3	Marketing	1
Drama	2	Plumbing	1
Food Preparation	2	Science	1

Although the majority of dropouts expect to stay with the job they have, one-fifth plan to quit and go back to school. Adult programs with their provision for rapid upgrading are especially suited to young people who wish to return to school. It would be helpful if secondary schools would make it easy for them to re-enter by providing individualized upgrading programs. Many have not completely abandoned school; they recognize the importance of education and have begun correspondence or night school courses.

Table 2.14 attempts to determine whether there is a relationship between the reasons students offer for dropping out and the number of credits they have at the time of school leaving. No simple pattern emerges from Table 2.14 except with regard to personal problems or personal issues. A disproportionately large number of students who had not missed a credit decided to leave because of personal problems.

TABLE 2.14: REASONS WHY STUDENTS DROPPED OUT, BY NUMBER OF CREDITS MISSING

	MISSING CREDITS					
REASON	0	1-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10+
To take/get a job	26%	40	29	33	39	32
Bored with school	19	20	28	25	22	31
Could not get "right" courses	0	4	3	4	0	3
Dislike level of difficulty	5	3	4	6	5	6
Pregnancy/marriage	7	5	5	5	3	2
Attendance/behind in credits	2	8	8	9	9	10
Dislike courses	5	0	3	2	0	2
Age (i.e., too old for school)	2	0	2	1	2	3
Family/personal problems	26	15	14	12	15	8
Teachers' strike	9	4	5	3	5	4

E. SUMMARY

Educators designing programs to keep students in school must recognize that the process of dropping out of school is a long, complex series of events. Programs designed to identify dropouts just prior to dropping out are not likely to be effective because the disengagement process is already well under way. Teachers and administrators must provide students with a systematic set of procedures that will enable them to recover lost credits and be more successful in future courses.

If students see secondary education primarily as career preparation, then it will be difficult to retain more students in the secondary school system unless a clearer relationship can be established between courses taken and access to particular careers. It is also true that the more successful students are the more likely they are to remain in school, although that relationship is stronger for students in the Advanced-level courses.

The Advanced-level academic courses that meet the requirements for students planning to attend university or college do not motivate work-bound students. These students typically argue they are more interested in applied work, but if applied courses are only vaguely related to career opportunities they will not have the desired effect. OSIS, like HS1 before it, still emphasizes individualized timetabling of student programs, and because of it, in part, the ministry's efforts to initiate vocational sequencing through school packages have not been realized in most schools. The interface with business and industry is weak and often exploitive on the part of the private sector. Even co-operative education programs, which do provide a sense of purpose for many students, are often not functionally linked to career possibilities. The large number of required courses in OSIS allows little room for failure and clearly acts as a disincentive for students taking Basic-level courses.

One of the most discouraging things for educators is the difference between student levels of performance and their ability. Many students in courses at the Basic and General levels simply do not try very hard. Most teachers have a personal example of a student who turned it around and began to succeed and they feel that somehow this should be the norm. For many students the advantages of working hard at school are less, on balance, than the risk of failure and the lack of career advancement opportunities. Solutions to the school-leaving problem must deal with student motivation as well as course and program relevance.

CHAPTER III

PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT OF STUDENTS

A. INTRODUCTION

Radwanski has drawn attention to the issue of students' part-time work and its impact on school achievement (1988, p. 81). In this study we examine not only the influence of part-time work on achievement in and adjustment to school, but also attempt to estimate the effect of part-time work opportunities on school leaving. Our previous research (King, 1986) and recent research completed in the United States (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986) established that there has been dramatic growth in the involvement of secondary school students in part-time work. The studies suggest that there is a point where part-time work begins to have an adverse effect on students' achievement and students' involvement in school activities. Of course, it is not as simple as defining a certain number of hours as the critical point, because it must inevitably vary from student to student. Nevertheless, part-time work has begun to have an important impact on life in schools.

The main purpose of this analysis was to determine: (1) if part-time work encourages students to leave school and thus contributes to a higher dropout rate; and, (2) if part-time work has any effect on the achievement and involvement of students in secondary school. In order to do this we surveyed 4,620 senior students in Grades 11 and above in 13 secondary schools.

We have chosen not to present information on students enrolled mainly in Basic-level courses. These students are under-enrolled in senior grades in general, and in our sample schools they are also under-represented overall.

When we classified students according to their reported level of difficulty, in addition to General and Advanced level, there was a third category of students (10 percent of the total) who took a mix of Advanced- and General-level courses.

B. EXTENT OF PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

Table 3.1 indicates that nearly two-thirds of students in Grades 11 and above are working part-time. In addition, over one-fifth (22%) are actively seeking part-time work. Therefore, it is safe to say that part-time work is a universal phenomenon among adolescents.

TABLE 3.1: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME, BY GRADE

GRADE	%
11	57
12	67
13	71

There are no real differences in the proportion of students taking mainly General- or Advanced-level courses who work part time, although those taking mainly General-level courses tend to work more hours (Table 3.2).

TABLE 3.2: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME, BY LEVEL

LEVEL	%
General	63
Advanced	64
1/2 Advanced/1/2 General	68

As Table 3.3 shows, girls are only slightly less likely to work part time. Between the ages of 15 to 19, the proportion of young people with part-time jobs increases (Table 3.4).

TABLE 3.3: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME, BY GENDER

GENDER	%
Male	64
Female	62

TABLE 3.4: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME, BY AGE

AGE	%
15	51
16	57
17	65
18	70
19	72

The socio-economic status of their families as described by the students does not seem to be much of a factor in who will work part time, although students with a higher-than-average family income are slightly less likely to work. This suggests that for the vast majority of students part-time work is not designed to contribute to family income; this point is confirmed later on in the analysis.

Table 3.5 presents the type of part-time work in which students become involved. There are male-female differences of some consequence with girls more likely to work in small retail stores and fast food outlets and boys in gas stations. But the range of jobs is substantial. However, the most common element is that they are low-paid, service industry jobs, perhaps well suited to young people who work part time, or older people who are looking for extra income. They effectively represent a band of employment opportunities for young people that contributes to the economy by making such service-oriented operations viable. Interestingly, they also are characterized by few opportunities for advancement.

TABLE 3.5: STUDENTS' TYPE OF PART-TIME WORK, BY GENDER

TYPE OF WORK	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Fast food	13%	20	16
Supermarket	10	8	9
Small retail store	8	18	12
Large retail store	8	9	9
Gas station	10	2	7
Convenience store	2	5	3
Recreation program	5	5	5
Babysitting	1	7	3
Restaurant	10	7	9
Motel/hotel	2	2	2
Farm	2	1	1
School	1	1	1
Factory	2	1	2
Other (e.g., bakery, driver/mover, cleaning/maintenance)	25	16	21

When we look at the reasons students offer for working part time we see that for most the primary purpose is personal spending (Table 3.6). Very few save for the future and only small numbers contribute to the family income or are self-supporting. The money is spent on clothes (probably with the tacit approval of parents who appreciate the saving), records, entertainment and visits to fast food emporiums. In fact, the students spend their money in great part in the very places in which they work.

TABLE 3.6: MAIN REASON FOR STUDENTS WORKING PART TIME

MAIN REASON	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
Personal spending	85%	87	85
Contribution to family income	9	6	7
Saving for future use	3	5	4
To support myself	2	1	2
Other	2	2	2

What we have, then, is an adolescent subculture designed around activities that need financing, a subculture directly linked to the economy which serves it and fuels it through cheap labour.

Few students (15%) receive any benefits other than wages and for those who do they are usually in the form of discounts on store merchandise or food. In order to determine whether full-time workers hold some animosity toward the students, we asked them how they view their relationships with full-time workers. We wanted to see if there are concerns that part-timers undercut salary and career opportunities. Since, for the most part, students are working in non-union situations, they reported very little antagonism based on the notion that students are taking away full-time work from others. Relationships with full-time employees generally do not pose any problems: 93 percent of students describe the relationship as positive. Where there are strong unions, as in the case of supermarket chains, there is more likely to be some tension. There are, in fact, many career part-timers who are relatively well paid in these chains. The use of students is not always seen in a positive light.

C. EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES

What is the perspective of those employers who hire students part time? What gain do they see for their establishments, and how does this influence their hiring policies? Representatives of 59 firms were either interviewed or surveyed by questionnaire to help us develop answers to these questions. Table 3.7 presents the employers classified by type of business.

TABLE 3.7: NUMBER OF EMPLOYERS BY TYPES OF FIRMS SURVEYED

FIRM TYPE	NO.
Supermarket	10
Small retail (e.g., clothing, shoe stores)	3
Small business franchise (e.g., record stores)	6
Small business (e.g., graphics, contractors)	10
Fast food franchise (McDonald's, Burger King, Swiss Chalet)	12
Large retail store (e.g., Canadian Tire)	2
Large department store (e.g., Eaton's, K-Mart)	13
Restaurant	3

1. Economic Benefits

It is clear that certain types of firms depend heavily on certain types of part-time workers. All chains or franchises surveyed employ part-time workers for at least 50 percent of their work force, and the fast food stores average closer to 75 percent. Ninety percent of the firms hire students younger than 18 and start them at or near a minimum wage of $3.50 an hour. In fact, the majority of part-time workers in the chains and franchises are under 18. The minimum wage for young people 18 and over is $4.35 an hour. Rapid turnover ensures that the minimum wage and its resultant savings to the company will be the norm. Wage increases are small but occur typically at regular intervals and are usually accomplished by a performance review. This review has two functions: it allows increases to be paid to steady, responsible workers and also provides the basis for dismissal. In those organizations where the workers are unionized (e.g., Swiss Chalet, Loblaws), there is more stability to student employment and pay increases are automatic.

Students represent low-cost labour. They are enthusiastic and flexible in terms of work time. They can generally be available at the busiest hours in the evenings and on weekends. They represent an extremely valuable and inexpensive labour resource. It is not surprising that they are cultivated in a systematic way by the large chains.

> The "old-fashioned pat on the back" of a worthy employee can be more effective than monetary rewards says....
>
> That kind of "sincere thanks" is sometimes more powerful than the raise, the profit-sharing plan contribution or the productivity pin. (The Kingston Whig-Standard, November 2, 1987)

2. Hiring Factors

Employers are anxious to get reliable workers. Companies such as McDonald's and Swiss Chalet hire by screening applicants and interviewing them. Wendy's uses student manpower and schools to promote job availability. Seventy percent of the employers said appearance was an important consideration. This includes not only a pleasant physical appearance in order to meet people, but also neatness and appropriate clothes and hairstyling. Fifty percent require personal references and another 30 percent require a resume along with the application form. Only one-quarter mentioned school records (above average performance in school and attendance) as a factor in the hiring process. A small number even mentioned church-going as an important consideration. In the past few years, there have been more applicants than jobs and, therefore, employers could be more selective. But more recently there has been a dramatic increase in the number of jobs available to young people in fast food restaurants, small clothing, record, and convenience stores. This increase in job availability has decreased the employers' capability to be as selective in hiring and has encouraged them to have their employees work more hours. Increasing the work time of low-achieving students has the effect of preventing them from performing effectively in school.

3. Transition to Work

Half of the employers stated there were instances where school dropouts continued to work with them but the other half discouraged this practice. For many of the firms, a student's decision to drop out of school was not linked to an opportunity for increased work, but essentially meant a termination notice. Many of the firms have a policy of not hiring school dropouts and, therefore, when the student drops out of school, they also drop out of the job. Others, such as representatives of A & P and K-Mart, stated that it did happen; in fact, A & P said they hire dropouts quite often. Students say the pay is good and some are drawn away from school to become full-time employees. Their job prospects are not dissimilar to others in the organization. None of the employers indicated that they ever directly encourage their student employees to go from part-time to full-time work.

4. Hours of Work

The range of hours of work reported by students is not very different from the range provided by employers, from 6 to 32 hours per week. Therefore, employers are aware when students are working an extensive amount of time. They must also be aware that working excessively must inevitably have a negative effect on performance in school. If a general policy was established at a school board level, or even a provincial level, regarding the maximum number of hours for part-time work for students, it is likely that the maximum would be accepted by the large chains and franchises in particular. It is important to these companies that they maintain good will in their communities and if it were seen that they were knowingly contributing to a lower level of performance in school for some students, they would probably feel they should follow such directives.

D. INFLUENCE OF HOURS WORKED

Some researchers argue that the premature affluence that part-time work brings to part-time worker students is unhealthy because it creates expectations that cannot be fulfilled in the early years of a career. It introduces poor saving skills, contributes to a pattern of spending on luxury items, and encourages work behaviours such as minimum effort and control over hours of work. Therefore, it can be said that the positive aspects such as the development of self-reliance and important work habits, such as punctuality and reliability, are counterbalanced by extravagances in spending and patterns of work behaviour that are not always positive.

Table 3.8 presents the average marks of students by number of hours worked. There is very little relationship between the two measures for students taking most of their courses at the General level. It is not surprising because school expectations for students who take General-level courses are relatively low: homework is not normally expected; tests and examinations are brief. In the case of the student taking Advanced-level courses, there is a point of decline in school achievement after 15 hours of part-time work, but even at that point it obviously affects some more than others. We correlated the number of hours worked with the impact they perceived on other aspects of their lives and, as expected, we found the more hours they worked, the less time they had to spend with family and friends, read, do hobbies, and play sports (Table 3.9). Those who worked many hours said it negatively influenced their homework, their study habits, their school marks, their concentration in class, and even their temperament (Table 3.10).

TABLE 3.8: WEEKLY HOURS WORKED, BY AVERAGE MARK AND LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

	AVERAGE MARK (Means)	
HOURS	General level	Advanced level
0	68.0	75.5
1 - 5	67.4	75.7
6 - 10	68.4	76.0
11 - 15	68.2	75.0
16 - 20	68.6	73.8
21 - 25	67.4	73.4
26 - 30	67.9	72.5
31+	67.8	73.0

TABLE 3.9: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AGREEING THAT
PART-TIME JOB PREVENTS SOME ACTIVITIES

	HOURS		
ACTIVITIES	1-15	16-20	21+
Extracurricular (school)	9	10	17
Time with family	9	11	17
Reading	6	6	10
Hobbies	10	11	19
Socializing with friends	15	16	23
Playing sports (outside of school)	9	11	17

TABLE 3:10: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AGREEING THAT PART-TIME JOB
JOB NEGATIVELY AFFECTS SOME ACTIVITIES

	HOURS		
ACTIVITIES	1-15	16-20	21+
Homework	9	12	18
Marks	6	8	14
Concentration during class	3	3	8
Studying for tests/exams	10	12	17
Relationship with teachers	1	1	4
Mood or temperament (e.g., get angry more easily)	7	9	14

Despite the negative effects of working upon other activities, there is substantial appeal to students to work part-time for the discretionary money it generates and for the opportunities for social interaction it presents. Table 3.11 presents the weekly hours worked by students in part-time jobs. Two-thirds of the boys work 16 hours or more; 45 percent work 21 hours or more. Girls work slightly fewer hours than boys, but still over 60 percent work 16 hours or more a week. One has to assume this large amount of work time must intrude on school, not only the hours spent in extracurricular activities and obtaining help with schoolwork, but also in activities outside of school such as homework and studying for exams.

TABLES 3.11: WEEKLY HOURS WORKED, BY GENDER

	%		
HOURS	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1 - 5	4	4	4
6 - 10	10	13	11
11 - 15	14	21	18
16 - 20	27	31	29
21 - 25	17	15	16
26 - 30	11	8	10
31 or more	17	9	13

E. IMPACT ON TRANSITION TO WORK

Does part-time work actually have the effect of encouraging students to leave school? For many young people who are experiencing failure in school, working must seem more attractive to them both on a personal and economic level. We have found in previous research that many low-achieving students obtain more personal satisfaction from their part-time work than they do from school. This not only relates to recognition they get for acting responsibly in carrying out the part-time job, but also for the relationships they establish there. Meeting people is the thing students say they like most about their job. The second favourite is the money they earn and third, the work atmosphere. Many students enjoy the work they are doing, the flexible hours they can work and the experience they are receiving. However, there are things about part-time work that are not as satisfying: working conditions, unpleasant relationships, and hours they are scheduled to work. Fifteen percent could think of nothing they disliked about their job.

Part-time work while in school provides discretionary income for social activities, but if students are out of school the wages earned would be at the poverty level. In the previous chapter we have shown that half the students who worked part time in their last year in school and who left school for work continued in the same work, but for the most part their continuation has to be seen as a matter of convenience which does not represent the beginning of a meaningful career. Table 3.12 shows that students taking mainly Advanced-level courses in particular do not plan on remaining with the same company. They view part-time work as something to do while going to school and as having no career implications. This is true for students taking mainly General-level courses but to a lesser extent.

TABLE 3:12: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO WOULD LIKE TO CONTINUE WORKING WITH THE SAME COMPANY AFTER THEY COMPLETE SCHOOL

	%	
	ADVANCED	GENERAL
Yes, same job	9	16
Yes, in another job	9	16
No	82	68

General-level boys are more likely than other groups of students to work long hours. They are also more likely to have low marks and drop out of school. We were unable to determine whether the cause of dropping out of school is working long hours or the relatively poor levels of achievement in school contributed to more time being allocated to part-time work. The more hours they are working, the more likely they are to think of leaving school (Table 3.13). There is also a slight relationship between the amount of money they receive for part-time work and whether they are thinking of leaving school and working full time.

TABLE 3.13: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO THINK OF QUITTING SCHOOL TO WORK FULL TIME, BY HOURS WORKED PER WEEK

HOURS	NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	A LOT
<10	71	14	14	2
11 - 20	62	17	17	4
21 - 25	56	18	22	5
26+	41	18	31	10

Table 3.14 indicates that 79 percent of students who work part time receive $5.50 or less an hour. This wage rate cannot be considered an inducement to quit school to work full time. However, as Table 3.15 shows, some students do think of quitting school for full-time employment. As expected, more students who think this take mainly General-level courses compared to those taking Advanced-level courses.

TABLE 3.14: CURRENT HOURLY WAGE OF STUDENT WORKERS

HOURLY WAGE	%
$3.50 or less	5
3.51 - 4.00	19
4.01 - 4.50	15
4.51 - 5.00	30
5.01 - 5.50	10
5.51 - 6.00	8
6.01 - 6.50	4
6.51 - 7.00	3
7.00 or more	6

TABLE 3:15: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO THINK OF QUITTING SCHOOL TO WORK FULL TIME

	%		
WOULD QUIT SCHOOL	ADVANCED	GENERAL	TOTAL
Never	67	46	58
Rarely	16	18	17
Sometimes	14	29	21
A lot	3	8	5

F. SUMMARY

It is our impression that part-time work meets the needs of many students. The money generated is necessary for a lifestyle predicated on stylish clothes, records, tapes, and eating and socializing at fast food restaurants. It also provides a source of success for those who experience little at school. But to move from part-time to full-time work at the same income is clearly undesirable. Nevertheless, for a significant minority of students the lack of success experienced in school must inevitably lead them to take this option.

It is probably safe to say that employment opportunities have little bearing on whether students will leave school for work. Although the current economic conditions have created a large number of low-paying jobs, these employment opportunities appear to exert little influence on school leaving.

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

We have shown in Chapter II that the main reason young people leave secondary school before graduating is that they have failed or are failing core academic courses. Conceding that some dropping out is inevitable, one could ask how much improvement in student retention rates can take place when course success rates increase What is the effect on student retention when the criteria for success in courses differ between schools? Has OSIS had an effect on course success rates and student retention? In this chapter we examine the effects of OSIS on course success rates and student retention and consider the influence of various evaluation strategies on student success.

More specifically, the chapter presents a discussion of (1) the success rates in courses for one year across 16 schools, and for four years from 1982-83 to 1985-86 to compare two years pre-OSIS with the first two years of OSIS implementation in seven schools, (2) the distribution of the marks of over 4,000 students at differing ability levels, (3) students' credit accumulation during their secondary school career before and after 1984-85, and (4) some notable approaches in procedures for evaluating students. We consider the forces which influence teachers in evaluating students taking General-level courses and discuss three approaches which can be seen on a continuum: at the one end the Teaching to Pass approach places proportionally more value upon the affective domain and less on the cognitive and at the other end, the Radwanski report recommends placing the weight on cognitive learning.

The information used in this chapter is based primarily on Phases I and IV of this study and comes from a variety of sources. We refer to the data obtained from four school boards for which, in preliminary discussions, the desired computer records from their schools appeared to be relatively accessible. We obtained credit accumulation and failure rate data as well as principals' comments and documents about evaluation policies and procedures. The questionnaire data from Grades 11 to 13 students in 13 schools are referred to as well as staff interviews and their student evaluation outlines for specific courses. And, of course, we are influenced by our knowledge of schools obtained from our previous research.

One of the important outcomes of this current study is the finding that few school boards have readily accessible procedures for reporting up-to-date information on the progress and credit accumulation of students throughout their time in school and almost none classify their students by the level of difficulty of the courses they take. This type of information is necessary so that a school board can analyze its own information on student progress and make critical decisions. Only four of the nineteen boards we approached showed promise of being able to contribute useful data. Reasons for school boards being unable to participate included: (1) the absence of a reliable data base to provide the data for up to four cohorts of Grade 9 enrolees; (2) the lack of the necessary computer support systems; and, (3) the absence of expertise to program the data in the requested form. Within an eight month timeframe, even the four participating boards had insurmountable difficulties in their ability to produce clean data; that is, with the levels of difficulty of the majority of students' courses specified and/or with transfers and dropouts clearly indicated. The inconsistencies in numbers of schools referred to in figures are due to missing data.

B. COURSE SUCCESS RATES AND MARKS DISTRIBUTIONS

We have learned a number of things about student achievement from our previous research, some of which have been reinforced in this study.

1) Success rates vary from school to school and from subject area to subject area. Figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 show the variability of the 1985-86 failure rates in Grades 9 Advanced- and General-level core courses from up to 16 schools representing four boards. Across all three courses at the General level there are slightly more schools at the high-failure rate end of the spectrum. Advanced-level failure rates are more compressed within the 0 to 25 percent range, the highest percentage of failures being in mathematics. The General-level failure rates in English are highest for two schools at 25 percent and 26 percent and in science and mathematics, for three other schools above 24 percent--science (25%) and mathematics (29% and 32%). Table 4.I demonstrates the variability in failure rates in Grade 9 among five schools within one school board, with the greatest variation occuring in General-level science, ranging from 3 percent to 25 percent.

Figure 4.1
Failure Rates: Grade 9 Mathematics
in 16 Schools (1985-86)

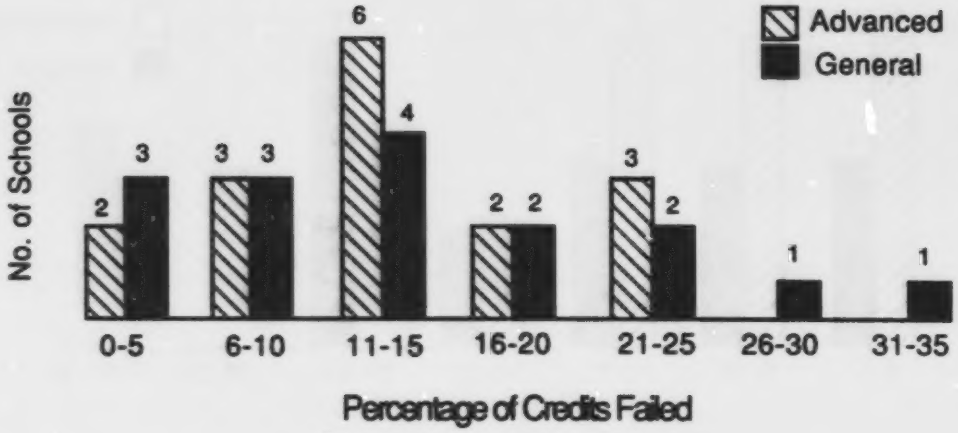


Figure 4.2
Failure Rates: Grade 9 Science
in 16 Schools (1985-86)

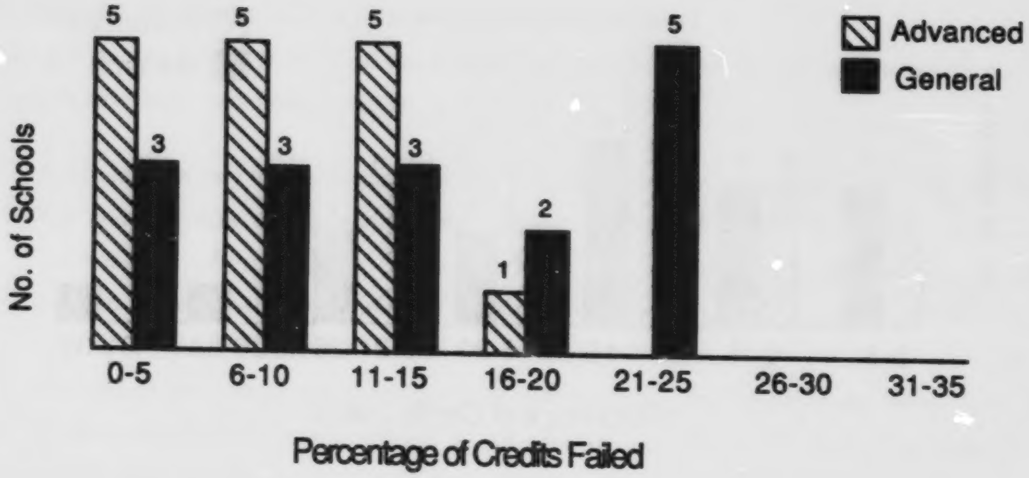
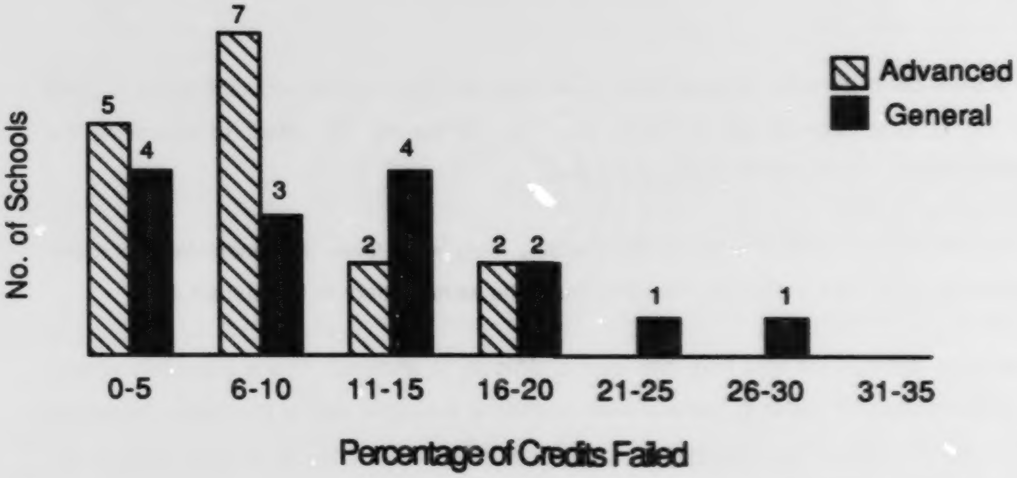


Figure 4.3
Failure Rates: Grade 9 English in 16 Schools* (1985-86)



* General Level data for 1 school is missing

TABLE 4.1: PERCENTAGE OF CREDITS FAILED IN BASIC-, GENERAL-, AND ADVANCED-LEVEL CORE COURSES (GRADE 9) IN FIVE SCHOOLS, ONE SCHOOL BOARD (1985-86)

	ENGLISH			MATHEMATICS			SCIENCE		
SCHOOLS	Basic	General	Advanced	Basic	General	Advanced	Basic	General	Advanced
1	4.2	19.2	1.7	2.4	2.5	4.9	20.0	22.4	1.8
2	NA	12.7	1.5	NA	2.7	5.6	NA	3.4	3.0
3	14.0	25.0	NA	20.6	16.2	NA	NA	22.0	NA
4	3.2	11.0	11.5	9.6	20.7	9.7	NA	25.0	14.9
5	NA	9.6	6.5	NA	22.8	12.7	NA	6.6	11.4
TOTAL	9.7	14.7	4.9	15.4	14.6	9.8	20.0	15.3	7.0

NA - Not applicable, courses at the level are not offered in the school or the data are missing.

The work being done by General-level committees in many boards, including those in some of the schools represented in Table 4-1, may be having the effect of improving the achievement of students taking these courses.

2) In our previous research we found that success rates were lower in General-level courses, particularly in Grades 9 and 10. We have found the same pattern in the current data.

3) The marks distributions vary from one level of difficulty to another. This is especially notable in the attenuation of marks in General-level courses at the upper end of the marks distribution which was exhibited in The Adolescent Experience (King, 1986) and can be seen again in this current analysis (Table 4.2).

TABLE 4.2: STUDENTS' AVERAGE MARKS (GRADES 11 AND UP)

AVERAGE MARK	GENERAL	ADVANCED	GENERAL/ ADVANCED*
81+	5	22	8
76-80	10	21	14
66-75	44	43	51
<66	42	15	27

SOURCE: Student questionnaire respondents re Part-time Employment (n=4,620)

*These respondents took one-half of their credits at one level and one-half at the other.

It is evident across all grades that high marks were obtained by very few students taking courses mainly at the General level.

4) In Grades 11 and 12 the failure rates typically decline, but a smaller proportion of students taking General-level courses compared with those taking Advanced-level courses continue to receive high marks. Figure 4.4 shows that more schools have a high percentage of General-level mathematics failures in Grade 11 than Advanced-level failures. Table 4.3, showing average marks by grade and level of difficulty, reveals that the marks of students taking mainly General-level and a mix of Advanced- and General-level courses are considerably lower than those of students taking all Advanced- level courses.

Figure 4.4
Failure Rates: Grade 11 Mathematics
in 12 Schools (1985-86)

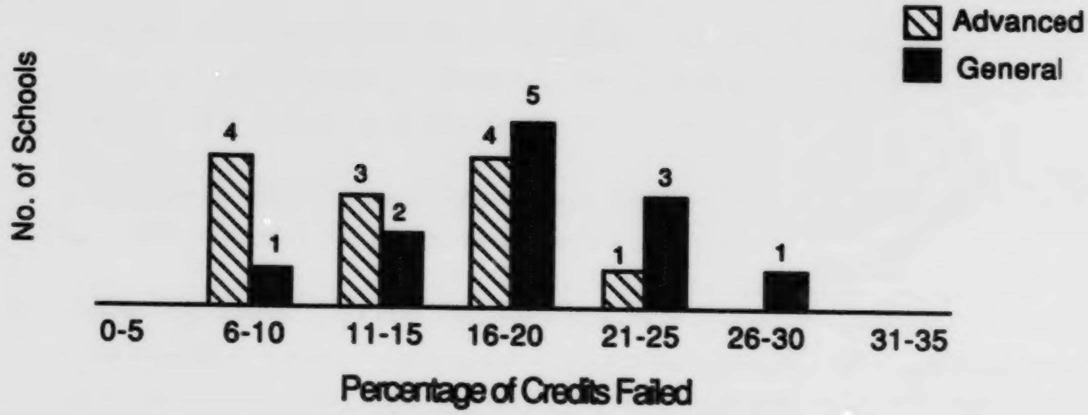


TABLE 4.3: AVERAGE MARK BY GRADE AND LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

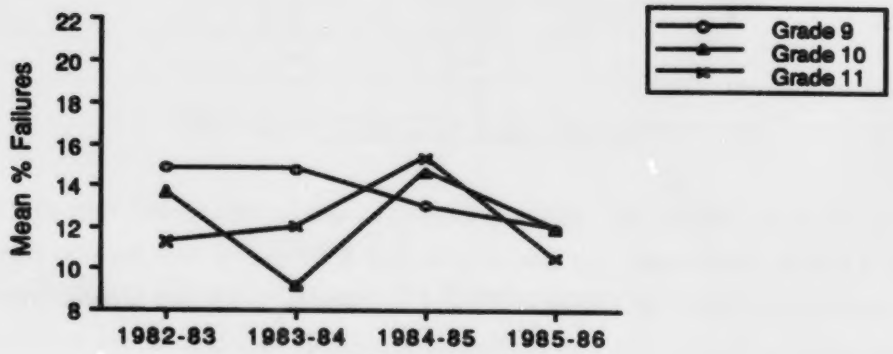
GRADE	ADVANCED	GENERAL	ADVANCED/GENERAL
9	75.6	66.7	70.2
10	73.5	65.3	68.5
11	73.9	65.6	68.3
12	73.5	66.4	68.0

SOURCE: The Adolescent Experience, King, 1986

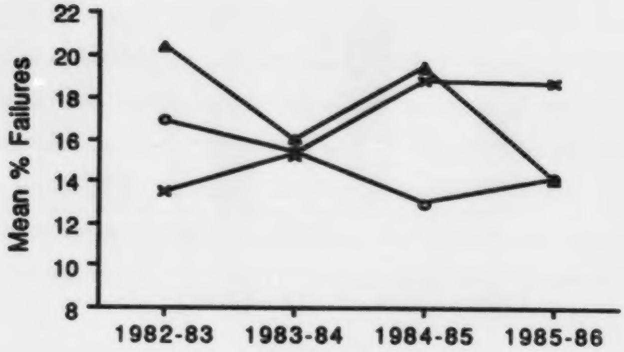
Figure 4.5 shows 1982-83 and 1983-84 (pre-OSIS) as well as 1984-85 and 1985-86 (OSIS) failure rates in English, mathematics, and science for Grades 9, 10, and 11. With the extra credits required for Grade 12 graduation (30 instead of 27) and the increase in required courses since OSIS was implemented in 1984-85, one might expect there to be an easing up on the proportion of failed credits. That has not been the case in comparison with credits failed in these core courses before OSIS. In the seven schools for which data were available (six within the same school board), the only course which shows a decline (by 1% each OSIS year) is Grade 9 English. Several sets of courses slightly peaked the first year of OSIS (Grade 10 English by 6%, Grade 11 English by 4%, Grade 10 mathematics by 3%, and Grade 11 Science by 4%), but by 1985-86, the failures were not lower than they had been before OSIS, except for Grade 10 math which was two points lower, 14 percent as opposed to 16 percent in 1983-84. It could be that these failure rates have continued to decline. Grade 11 math and Grade 10 science might have stabilized. High failure rates in core academic courses typically lead to high dropout rates; however, a number of variables can intervene here: community expectations, the difficulty level a school assigns to non-academic courses, and a school's evaluation policies.

One intervening variable can be described as the expectations of a school's community. Some communities expect their students to remain in school until graduation in part because of the nature of the local economy. For example, the Ottawa and Carleton Boards of Education have shown lower attrition rates than rural parts of the province where many students leave school early to enter the family business, farming, or become employed in some other small enterprises. This is true even if failure rates are held constant.

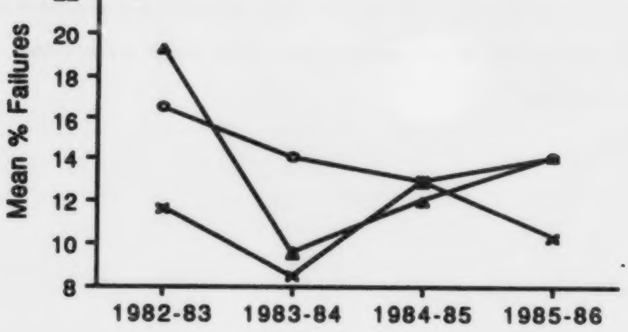
Figure 4.5
Grade 9 to 11 - General-Level Course
Failure Rates in 7 Schools
Pre-OSIS and OSIS



English



Mathematics



Science

The level of difficulty at which non-academic courses are offered is another intervening variable. Many schools facilitate scheduling by offering courses such as visual arts, music, physical education, business education, and technological studies only at the General level. This has the effect of bringing together students who take most of the remainder of their courses at the Advanced and at the General level. No matter what the failure rates are in these courses, almost all of the failures will be experienced by those students who take the majority of their courses at the General level. Very few students taking mainly Advanced-level courses are unsuccessful in the courses offered at the General level. This results in a substantial increase in the number of students taking mainly General-level courses who fall behind in their credit accumulation. Therefore, in comparing schools that have similar proportions of students taking mainly General-level academic courses, but differ only in offering (e.g., School 1) or not offering (School 2) non-academic courses at more than one level, there will be significant differences in dropout rates because there will be more students who accumulate credits at the General level in one school (School 1) than in the other (School 2). In other words, credit loss will be more evenly distributed across levels in the one school (School 1) than in the other (School 2).

The third intervening variable is school policy. High course failure rates are carefully monitored and discouraged in some schools and not in others. The number of failures is usually reduced when staff and administrator meetings take place to discuss student progress and decide whether a student completely fails a course or some arrangement can be made; for example, the student may receive a credit at a lower level of difficulty.

School board and school evaluation policies will influence the marks students receive. Some boards and schools monitor the success rates in courses and some principals will have unacceptable marks adjusted at either end of the distributions to minimize failures and excessively high marks. Evaluation policies exist in some schools, even though they are expressed informally, for recommended means or medians and the extent to which failure rates are controlled. Quite common was this type of comment made by a principal:

> Discussions are held with department heads with respect to abnormally high failure rates. Department heads are expected to review the cases with teachers.

Rarely did principals state what high failure rates were, only in a few cases did some mention that percentages over a certain figure (e.g., 6%, 10%, 15%, and 25%) were reviewed before and/or during promotion meetings and acceptable explanations sought from the teachers.

In one school, department heads and the administrators review student progress part way through the semester with a "Stitch in Time" form completed by the teacher listing the reasons for low marks and action to be taken (e.g., parent interview). Then marks range sheets are presented to the principal at the end of term/semester after which failures are reviewed with the teachers in question.

The principals' reports and student evaluation documents that were forwarded from 12 schools indicated relatively standard procedures regarding the following:

1) Evaluation policies that are set out by subject departments include each course's weighting of marks for each source (e.g., tests--20%, group projects--10%). The weightings vary across courses and subjects. Some departments are guided by weighting factors specified in new ministry guidelines. In fact, two principals remarked that since OSIS began, more teachers are actually employing a greater variety of evaluation techniques.

2) Teachers are expected to give an outline of course and evaluation expectations to the students and to the administrative office at the beginning of each semester. One school even sets aside a day each semester when students and parents receive copies of evaluation policies and procedures with provision for their signatures to show that they have understood them.

3) Exams are a part of every school's evaluation procedures although the weighting assigned to them varies across subjects. Generally, the weighting can be between 20 and 60 percent of the total mark. Typically, there are two sets of examinations, one each term or semester with provision for recommendations for exemption from the final exam if marks exceed 65 percent and the teacher approves. One staff policy statement includes the following comment:

   > Teachers will be asked to set certain examinations in the subjects they teach. The department head will be responsible for approving each examination and the marking scheme for it. Teachers must follow the approved marking schemes for each respective course so that all students are marked fairly and a uniform standard of evaluation is maintained.

   Only one principal mentioned that he reviews sample examination questions for difficulty level and appropriateness. Usually, department heads are solely responsible for reviewing the exams prepared by teachers in the department.

4) Instructions or guidelines from administration are provided in the school calendar and some are more explicity described in a separate (2-4 page) document. They usually include

statements about formal examinations, whether they are required per term or semester, final exam exemption policy, grading system, procedures for reporting to parents, and the fact that each department has a set of clear expectations. In a few schools the policy statement includes some philosphical statements about evaluation; for example, the purpose of and difference between formative and summative evaluation. A few set out the distribution of the proportion of marks expected by term/semester for General- in contrast to Advanced-level academic courses. In a few schools, the policy document is common to all schools in the board. In only one school calendar is there information about each department's evaluation procedures and weightings.

The same principals' reports indicated no standardized procedure across schools for monitoring and controlling failure rates, although there is an attempt by some school administrators to at least informally do so. As a result, there is variability in the success students achieve in the same courses from one school to another. The implications affect students being able to continue their studies at the post-secondary level. Why should "successful" students from one school have more of an advantage over the "successful" students from another in entering the post-secondary institution of their choice?

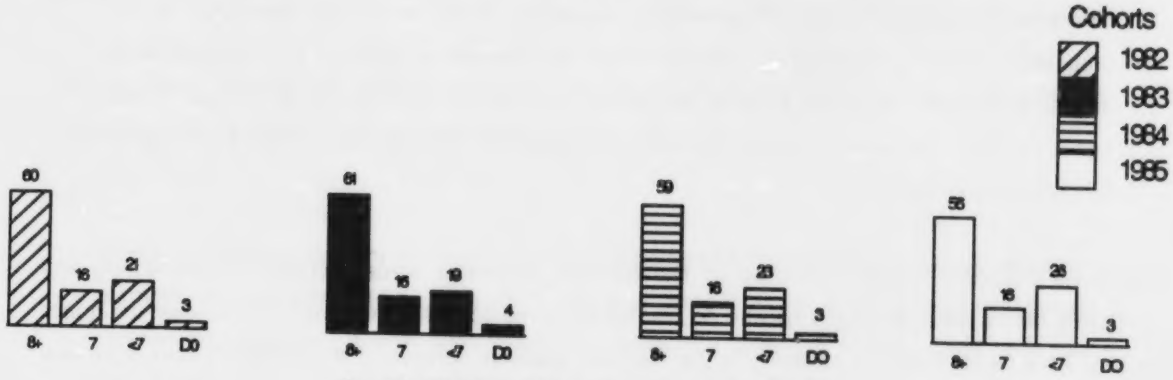
Certainly, the success of students taking Advanced- and General-level courses varies from one school to another as well, with students taking General-level courses at the bottom end of the marks distributions more likely to leave school before graduation. The more restrictive OSIS requirements of 30 credits before graduation and required credits in core subjects in which the student taking General-level courses has not done well makes the graduation diploma much less of an incentive for the student who has already experienced failures. The next section discusses credit accumulation in the current OSIS system compared with the previous system.

C. CREDIT ACCUMULATION PATTERNS

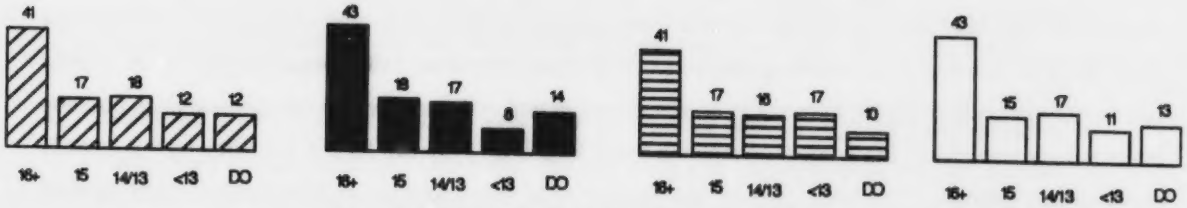
We refer in this part to the credit accumulation data of the schools in four school boards.

Figure 4.6 indicates the numbers of credits accumulated and the dropouts each year since 1982 of the students in General-level courses before and after OSIS was implemented. The data are aggregated for those originally enrolled each of the four years in 18 schools. It is important to note that because of the questionable quality of these data in one board, estimates had to be made based on trends shown by overall totals; therefore, the actual dropout figures may not be totally accurate.

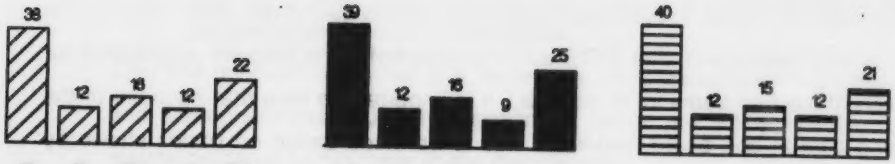
Figure 4.6
Credit Accumulation of Students Taking Courses at the General Level in 18 Schools
(Two Pre-OSIS Cohorts and Two OSIS Cohorts)



Credits Obtained After One Year (Grade 9)



Credits Obtained After Two Years (Grade 10)



Credits Obtained After Three Years (Grade 11)

* DO = dropouts

The data for students still in school and graduating or dropping out this year were unavailable at the time this report was prepared. We can see that before and after OSIS began (in 1984) the difference in credits accumulated and the proportion of dropouts are not dramatically different. The point must be made, however, that with the requirement by OSIS of an increase from 27 to 30 credits necessary for graduation, it logically follows that there will be an increase in students who stay in school a fifth year or who leave school early or both and some decrease in the proportion of students graduating after four years of school. The credit accumulation of the cohorts who began school in 1984 and 1985 would have to be traced for their fourth year, 1987-88 and 1988-89, in order to verify this prediction.

D. APPROACHES TO STUDENT EVALUATION

How do teachers evaluate students of different abilities and yet motivate each of them to continue to do their best to learn the subject matter, achieve success, and stay in school? In this section we describe the approaches teachers generally follow when evaluating students in courses of different levels of difficulty. We discuss the forces which are now influencing teachers in their evaluation of students: The Teaching to Pass movement which encourages teachers to emphasize work habits, social skills, participation, and effort (the affective aspects) as opposed to substantive learning (the cognitive aspect), the more systematic evaluation approach to cognitive learning as exemplified in Making the Grade, (see p.55), and finally the affirmation of the acquisition of knowledge and skills (the cognitive domain) which has been advocated in the recent Radwanski report.

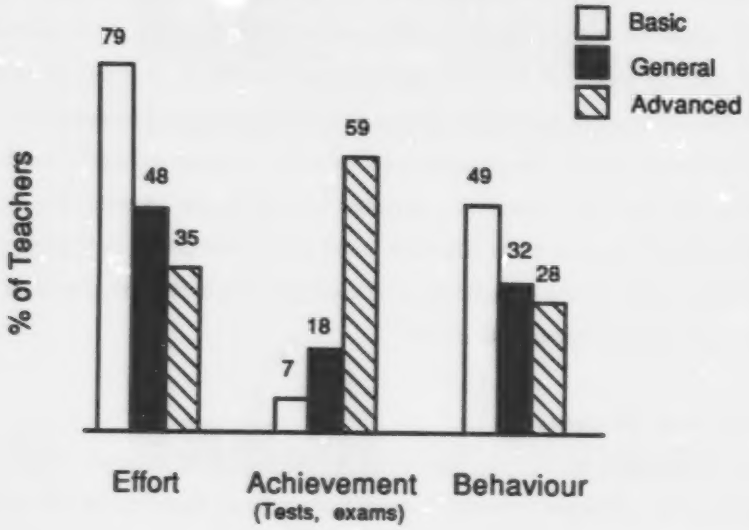
1. How Teachers Evaluate Students

The 5,000 teachers who participated in The Teaching Experience (King, Warren, Peart, 1988) reported how they evaluated students. Different factors influence the marks of students taking courses at differing levels of difficulty (Figure 4.7).

In Advanced-level academic subjects, marks are typically awarded for achievement demonstrating knowledge and skills in tests and examinations. There is an attempt to make course and evaluation expectations clearly understood by the students, and criteria for success do not differ substantially within and across schools. This is reinforced by the fact that course content and evaluation policies are likely to be consistent with ministry guidelines. Failure rates do vary although less in comparison with those in General-level courses.

In General-level courses there is far less consistency within and across classes on what is to be evaluated. Behaviour, effort, and attendance become factors in evaluation and bonus marks are used extensively. The controlling of students not only by means of specific teaching methodologies but also

Figure 4.7
Teachers' Evaluation Criteria
(% Agreeing "very important")



Source: King, Warren and Peart, The Teaching Experience, 1988 by evaluation becomes important. The student taking courses at this level tends to seek credits rather than marks so that only the minimum "safe" mark is the goal. This explains the homogeneous mark distributions in senior grades discussed in the previous section.

In the past few years, administrators and school General-level committees have placed some pressure on teachers to reduce General-level course failure rates. Attendance continues to be a problem in these courses, homework is typically not done, and teachers are very uncomfortable dealing with the evaluation of these students because of the dilemma about student discipline and giving marks for little or nothing accomplished by the students.

In Basic-level courses, more marks tend to be given for attendance, effort and behaviour than is the case in Advanced- or General-level courses. The lack of textbooks and guidelines in Basic-level courses represents a particularly difficult challenge in the struggle to retain students in courses.

"Evaluation is not an end in itself; rather it is a part of the learning process for both the student and the teacher" (OSIS, p. 34). To say that teachers of students in Basic-level programs by and large, own this philosophy is an understatement. For students in Basic-level programs, who so often had failing marks in the past, everything possible is now being done to help them achieve a passing mark. If they attend, have a "good attitude", and exert a modicum of effort, they will pass. The present evaluation focus of most of the staff of the eight Basic-level programs in this study could be summarized as day-to-day, formative evaluation with an emphasis on attitudes and social skills. "Students are expected to behave as they would in the workplace. Social skills, manners, and discipline have to be worked on before the shop skills," one teacher commented. Teachers tend to give between 40 percent and 60 percent for skills and practical work (a large part of that allocation is a reflection of attitude and participation, some teachers explained), 20 percent to 30 percent for examinations and tests (two of the eight programs did not have exams), 10 percent to 20 percent for notebooks, and 10 percent to 20 percent for behaviour and attendance. There is increased use of the open book during tests and examinations in some schools. "We are teaching problem-solving skills, not regurgitation," one teacher of Basic-level courses commented. It is possible, therefore, for a student to fail an examination but still pass due to his or her term work and good behaviour.

Preparation for work is uppermost in the minds of all involved with Basic-level programs. Employability, in its narrowest sense--the ability to arrive on time, do as one is told, be well-behaved, attend regularly, read instructions, complete job applications--is what is important and makes the difference between passing and failing in Basic-level courses.

2. Teaching to Pass

Teaching to Pass is an approach to evaluation as well as an approach to teaching students in General-level courses. The approach and the characteristics of the school in which it was originally introduced are discussed in some detail in Chapter VI. It has been developed and promoted by a team of educators from Western Ontario. The approach has interested many teachers across the province and has been adopted by some teachers and some schools. Teaching to Pass is predicated on the philosophy that every student who attends classes and does his or her work can pass. The goal to promote success among students in General-level courses is the essence of Teaching to Pass. The emphasis is on teaching work-related responsibilities and job-related social skills as well as transmitting knowledge to these students--those who will advance from school into the work world and to a lesser extent community college.

Those who advocate the Teaching to Pass approach stress the following weighting in the evaluation of students taking courses at the General level: 40 percent academic work and 60 percent social skills, work ethic, and attendance (the school's attendance policies are an integral part of Teaching to Pass). This weighting is in contrast to the usual 60 percent academic work and 40 percent participation, class work, attendance, etc., in an Advanced-level course. The breakdown of marks in courses that follow the Teaching to Pass approach are made explicit to students and parents as follows:

a) **Academic Work** - 200 Marks; rewriting a test or redoing a task for sufficient mastery to achieve a pass is encouraged.

b) **Attendance** - 100 Marks for attending regularly and being on time for every class.

c) **Work Ethic** - 100 Marks for completing their homework and working diligently on in-class assignments.

d) **Social Skills** - 100 Marks for cooperating with peers and showing a positive attitude and behaviour.

The total of 500 marks is divided by 5 for a term mark out of 100.

The testimony of one teacher of mathematics and science who has been at the school for 17 years is descriptive of what Teaching to Pass has done for his teaching.

> I did it last year in two classes of General-level Grade 11s. I volunteered for one reason only: it was a way to survive with two rooms full of 60 General-level students who didn't want to learn. I had to find a way to adjust and I was looking for some way of changing. Teaching to Pass provided some of the philosophy that I felt I needed: don't be so strict on academics.

> I stress to the kids the idea of success in all things is important not just in academics. I show them some caring and that they could pass math. In general, I give more projects, take home projects, and more group work with more interaction. In Advanced, I emphasize more individual work and keep plugging away at course material; I teach for more independence.
>
> I think that any good teacher committed to the students on a more personal level teaches according to the Teaching to Pass philosophy.... But I think that as we get older we tend to lose some of that good philosophy and negativity creeps into our teaching and we lose sight of that good pedagogy. So in that sense TTP helps teachers who need it to regain some of that more open and relaxed method of teaching. It makes things much easier when you take the time to get to know your students.

The Teaching to Pass approach formalizes what a number of teachers have been doing for years. It legitimizes many teachers' de-emphasis of evaluation of substantive learning and their increased emphasis on attitude and effort for students of lesser abilities.

3. Making the Grade

Making the Grade is a collection of materials developed on the basis of sound principles of student evaluation in relation to the subject matter. It differs from Teaching to Pass in that most of the materials emphasize the evaluation of cognitive rather than affective learning. The book was developed during the 1984 school year by a special writing committee of six coordinators and consultants from the Board of Education for the City of Etobicoke and published in 1987 by Prentice-Hall Canada Ltd. The target audience is both elementary and secondary school administrators and teachers. Included in the presentation to the board of the final product was a detailed plan for disseminating the approach and assisting teachers and administrators in the implementation of the materials. So far, over 100 one- and two-day workshops have been held by the chairperson, Karl McCutcheon, in 40 different school board jurisdictions and more are scheduled out of province.

The book, written in easily understandable terms with simple headings and subheadings, is composed of the following general themes: (1) a discussion of student evaluation, characteristics of evaluation procedures, and elements of evaluation policies; (2) a description of various methods with their advantages, disadvantages and suggested steps in their construction; and (3) an outline of procedures for differentiating evaluation for students of differing levels of ability, including the exceptional. The workshops appear to have involved participants in various well-conceptualized activities that allow them to be introduced to some of the major premises and materials of the document as well as developing a personal plan for initiating the improvement of one's own evaluation system. A co-author declared in an interview that an unintended outcome of the workshop, which encourages examination by a school's teachers of their evaluation procedures, is the participants' declaration that the experience has a favourable impact on classroom teaching.

Some practical and some innovative ideas include suggestions for teaching study skills, devices for using observational techniques, an outline of three diagnostic techniques, guidelines for reporting on the evaluation of exceptional students, and three examples of procedures differentiated for Basic, General and Advanced levels of ability (for example use of a pretest in mathematics).

The Making the Grade approach would be useful as a starting point in the development or refinement of evaluation procedures and policies for a given course, grade, department, and an entire shcool. Some basic principles which are expounded by means of the materials outlined in the text and in the workshops are as follows:

1) the necessary connection between the specified learning objectives and the evaluation procedures;

2) emphasis upon a variety of evaluation techniques, not only tests and examinations;

3) use of formative evaluation and diagnostic evaluation, not only summative evaluation;

4) the necessity of differentiating evaluation for students taking courses at different levels of difficulty; and

5) The need to regularly monitor evaluation techniques within and across subject departments.

In contrast to the affective approach in Teaching to Pass and the more academic approach stressing cognitive learning in Making the Grade, the Radwanski recommendations advocate a return to standardized provincial testing, not only for accountability purposes but for diagnostic assessment of student achievement of knowledge and skills; there is no mention of the assessment of teaching objectives pertaining to the affective domain. The Radwanski report refers to what is described as "compelling" evidence of public support for reverting to standardized testing.

The universities have complained publicly of the uneven abilities of students from different secondary schools. This phenomenon and the pressure created by employers who perceive that the literacy standards of young employees have deteriorated in comparison to the literacy of previous new employees are two principal forces which are pushing towards instituting standardized examinations across the entire school system. The Ontario Assessment Instruments Pool (OAIP), involving a series of instruments for evaluation in various courses designed and disseminated by the Ministry of Education for teachers' use on a voluntary basis, has been an attempt to improve the quality of student evaluation. However, the numbers of teachers who use the pool of instruments are not large. The fact that certain school boards have taken the initiative to reinstate standardized examinations because they have recognized the inequities in student evaluation will serve to influence others to move in the same direction. In Advanced-level English it is specified in the new ministry guidelines that a course examination(s) must count for 30 percent of a student's final mark and it is expected that the mathematics guidelines will stipulate a similar requirement.

It is likely that an increasing number of boards will choose to have all of their schools participate in the ministry's Provincial Review Program which tests students in two subjects at different grades in a few schools within a board which volunteers to participate. Twenty-seven boards volunteered to participate in a recent review of geography and more recently a greater number (43) volunteered for a chemistry and physics review in Grades 11 and 12.

There seems to be little question that the pressure to systematize the evaluation of students is increasing. Many teachers see a need to improve the way in which they evaluate students, but not to the extent of reinstating the province-wide system of 25 years ago. Many cite the inequities of such a system: the necessity of having to gear up all year to teach the students to "regurgitate" anticipated content, the unnecessary stress placed on both students and teachers, the inappropriateness of such exams for non-academic students who have no intention of continuing their schooling at the post-secondary level. On the other hand, an approach such as Teaching to Pass which encourages teachers to assess students on the basis of effort, work habits, attendance, and participation while downplaying the academic side of learning may be short changing students vis-a-vis the substantive content of their courses. If the goal is to retain students to graduation, then the Teaching to Pass philosophy is useful. It may help students develop the general qualities of the employee that employers seek: punctuality, interpersonal skills, perseverence with a task, and reliability in showing up for work. The program Teaching to Pass is an attempt to meet the needs of non-academic students and affirm that their needs are very different from more academic students bound for universities and colleges. The latter students require a fair system for qualifying for admission to those institutions and preparation for the examinations they will have to write at that level.

E. SUMMARY

Success rates in courses vary from one school to another; that is, more students, particularly those in General-level courses, fail core courses in some schools but not in others. The higher the failure rate the greater the dropout rate.

Evaluation policies affect the degree of success students can attain in a given course. Variability in those policies will result in differences in course success or failure rates. There is pressure, which culminates in the Radwanski report, to standardize policies by implementing mandatory standardized testing that would comprise a large portion of students' final marks. There is also pressure to improve the school experience for students taking mainly General-level courses and to encourage their success in their courses. Administrators who attempt to control failure rates are somewhat motivated by this pressure. The Teaching to Pass philosophy is also a growing force which continues to change teachers' attitude toward student evaluation. The emphasis on evaluating students' display of the content and skills that have been learned is downplayed by teachers adopting this philosophy. Educators are caught in the dilemma of whether to manipulate "success rates" by placing more weight on affective measures (e.g., social skills, effort, and attendance) for low-achieving students so that fewer of them will fail and stay in school or to place priority on evidence that the academic objectives have been achieved and risk losing these students.

Pre- and post-OSIS credit accumulation patterns do not differ substantially. This relatively constant phenomenon, suggests that now that more credits are required for a student to be eligible for graduation, either more students will remain in school for a fifth year or more will drop out early, or more students will do both.

CHAPTER V

EXEMPLARY PROGRAMMING AT THE BASIC LEVEL

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this part of the research was to identify programs or program elements that will effectively serve students who take all or most of their courses at the Basic level. Our most important criterion of program effectiveness, of course, is relatively high student retention rates until graduation. But we also examine other measures of program success such as student and teacher perceptions, the community view of the program or school and the ways in which the program facilitates transition to work.

In the past, very few students who take mainly Basic-level courses have attended a College of Applied Arts and Technology. Recently, the colleges have attempted to design a number of programs to attract these students, but a strong argument can be made that it is not realistic to have college attendance be a natural progression for students who take their courses at the Basic level of difficulty. Such students are substantially below the level of other secondary school students in terms of preparation in English, science, and mathematics. They represent very small numbers of secondary school graduates overall and, perhaps most importantly, it is difficult enough for such students to aim for secondary school graduation. Suggesting that college attendance is a reasonable goal could have the effect of acting as a disincentive. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the flexibility of the system implies that these students should be able to attend college if they so desire.

Students who take their courses at the Basic level of difficulty represent a category of students in all provinces and in every country in the western world. These students are usually segregated in some form, and secondary school is seen as preparation for a job and for life. While these students may make up different proportions of the student population in different parts of the world, concerns for the most effective educational programs for them are common.

B. WHO ARE THE STUDENTS AT THE BASIC LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY?

The Ministry of Education defines Basic-level courses as follows:

> Basic-level courses are designed to focus on development of personal skills, social understanding, self-confidence, and preparation for the world of work. The academic work and related skills should be perceived by the student as being personally useful. Such courses will assist students to prepare for a successful, independent home and working life, to manage personal financial resources, to communicate effectively, and

> to develop attitudues that foster respect for the environment, good health and fitness, and a positive approach towards work and leisure. (OSIS, p. 16)

However, they also provide confusing references with regard to the classification of students. It is noted that these terms refer only to courses and not to students. It is also stated that school-related packages should be offered. These packages refer to sets of courses "for students who may have a specific educational goal in mind". It is difficult to imagine students choosing packages and not being designated in terms of the level of difficulty of the package.

Briefly, students who take the majority of their courses at the Basic level can be characterized as follows:

1) they have had consistent lack of success in academic achievement throughout elementary school;

2) they have experienced formal remediation or special classes at some time during elementary school; and

3) they are often tested for reading and academic aptitude before being recommended by teachers in Grade 8 to take courses at the Basic level.

The recommendation to take Basic-level courses normally comes from school board officials (e.g., psychologists, consultants) as well as from teachers.

The students taking mainly Basic-level courses do so in two types of school settings. First, there are over 50 special vocational schools in the province where the majority or all of the courses are offered at the Basic level. These schools offer a wide range of vocationally-oriented courses. Secondly, there are composite schools where courses are offered at three levels of difficulty. In these schools, there is a core of students who take all or most of their courses at the Basic level of difficulty.

There is remarkable variability across the province in the proportions of students who take their courses at the Basic level. In recent years, a much higher proportion of students in metropolitan areas were taking Basic level in comparison to those in smaller communities. However, there has been a trend in these larger centres to have fewer students taking mainly Basic-level courses as vocational schools come under fire because of an impression of social class, racial, and ethnic stereotyping. Across the province approximately seven percent of students take their courses mainly at the Basic level with a greater proportion in Grades 9 and 10 because of the relatively high attrition rates in Grades 11 and 12.

It was only a few years ago that courses beyond Grade 10 were not available for such students. When the Ministry of Education encouraged schools to have students at the Basic level continue in Grades 11 and 12, in some instances it was necessary for them to take courses at the General level to do so. Therefore, it is only recently that composite schools have offered four years of Basic-level programming and have established expectations that these students will graduate. The vocational schools were implemented primarily in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the expectation that students could stay four years to graduation. There still are many teachers who feel that transition to work is a more realistic goal for these students and graduation is of less importance. The Certificate of Education which requires only 14 courses was designed to recognize that many of these students would not graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

C. SELECTION OF THE EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS

The eight Basic-level programs studied were selected because they were reported to have at least one exemplary feature. Information came from school boards, Ministry of Education officials, and our previous research. We were very much aware that it would be difficult to find the perfect combination of all good features in any one school; however, when asked if there were things happening in their schools of which they were proud, superintendents were able to identify particular aspects of programs. It was important to study as comprehensively as possible the context for the exemplary aspects of each of the programs selected in order to make connections in terms of the criteria of effectiveness--retention and school satisfaction--and judgements about the ideals that could be strived for in Basic-level programming in general.

The reasons the eight programs were chosen, in addition to school size and location are summarized in Table 5.1.

TABLE 5.1: CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF BASIC-LEVEL PROGRAMS

SCHOOL	STUDENT POPULATION	LOCATION	REASON FOR SELECTION
A	100 of 1000	Small city	Structured program with co-operative education
B	180 of 1200	Rural/village	Student-centred orientation
C	70 of 700	Small town	Structured program co-operative education
D	80 of 800	Rural/small town	Integrated, self-contained
E	250	Urban	Focus on retention
F	400	Suburban	Work experience, packages, admission procedures
G	600	Urban	Multicultural, community relations thrust
H	400	Suburban	New school, careful selection of staff

D. PROGRAM RETENTION

The main purpose of this analysis is to identify the programs that have the effect of encouraging greater numbers of students to remain in school. There are other aspects of program effectiveness, such as teacher/student satisfaction and quality of preparation for work and life, and these will be dealt with in more detail in later sections of the analysis. In order to determine how efficient a program is, it is necessary to examine the attrition rates. In the following, each of the programs is briefly discussed in relation to the dropout rates for two periods of time: 1983-87, pre-OSIS, and 1984-87, the first OSIS cohort. We do not have graduation figures for the second group at this time because they are still in their fourth year of secondary school. For purposes of comparing these programs with provincial norms, we will use a dropout estimate of 70 percent as representative of the provincial norm for students who take the majority of their courses at the Basic level.

I. Composite Schools

Figure 5.1 presents the dropout and graduation rates for the four composite schools for the 1983-87 cohort. It can be clearly seen that there are substantial differences from school to school with School A the lowest at 38 percent graduating and School C the highest with 64 percent. All schools are above the provincial average, but only in Schools C and D can the program be said to have had a significant effect on dropout rates.

Figure 5.1
Progress of Students Taking Basic-Level Core Courses in Four Composite Schools
1983-87 Cohort

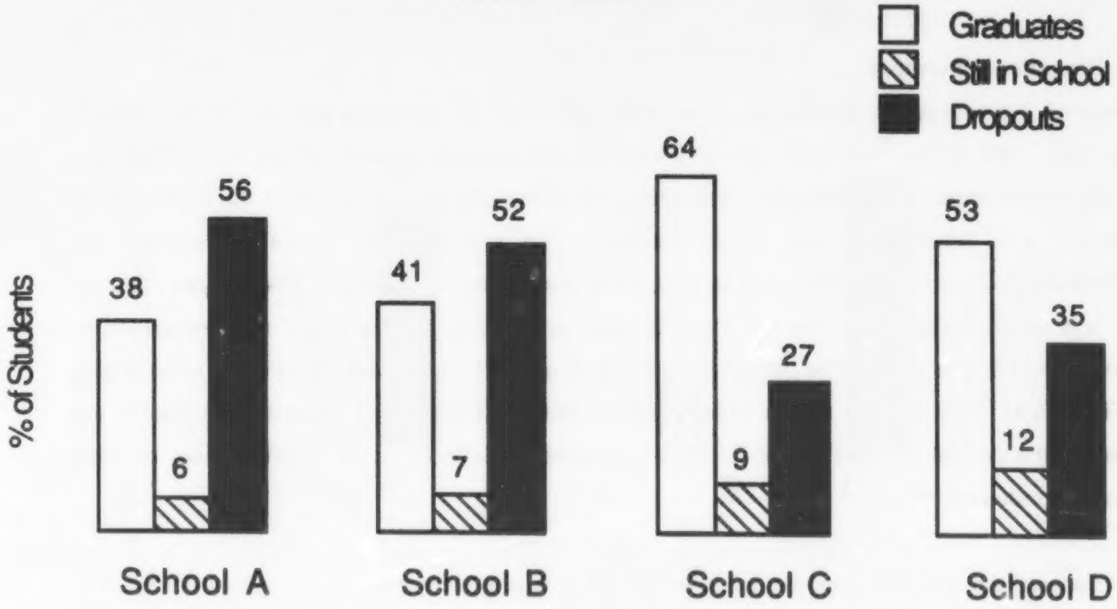


Figure 5.2 presents three years of credit accumulation for the 1984-87 cohort students taking Basic-level programs and courses in the composite schools. It can be clearly seen that in comparison with the 1983 cohort, School A continues to have a relatively high dropout rate; but, Schools B, C, and D show a substantial increase in dropouts by the third year. Since we are comparing three years of dropouts (1984-87) with four years of dropouts (1983-87), and since the proportion of students well behind in credit accumulation is large in all cases, we must assume an increase in the dropout rates for the second cohort of students. It would appear that the benefits gained by the program designs may be countered by the increase in credits required by OSIS to graduate.

2. Vocational Schools

Figure 5.3 presents the dropout and graduation rates for the vocational schools for the 1983-87 cohorts. (We do not have this type of information for the new school, School H.) There is a substantial difference in graduation rates among the three schools with School F the highest at 60 percent and School G, lowest at 23 percent. The students that School G transfers into General-level courses at other schools have been discounted completely in this analysis. School G is at about the provincial norm in the proportion of dropouts, School F had substantially fewer, and School E, the same. The pattern for Schools E and G for the 1984 cohort is not encouraging (Figure 5.4). The dropout rate is already high in School G and many students in School E are behind the normal success rate in credit accumulation. School F is on target to meet its 1983 cohort graduation rates.

In general, the dropout rates for these seven schools are lower than the provincial norm. The exception is School G; however, much is still to be learned about its program. Overall it can be seen that dropout rates tend to be much higher at the Basic level than at the Advanced and General, but that the majority of the programs are more successful at retaining students to graduation than has been the case in the past and in comparison with the provincial norm. It is difficult to link specific aspects of the programs to retention, but in the discussion and description that follow, we attempt to establish such relationships.

Figure 5.2
Progress of Students Taking Basic-Level Core Courses in Four Composite Schools
1984-87 Cohort

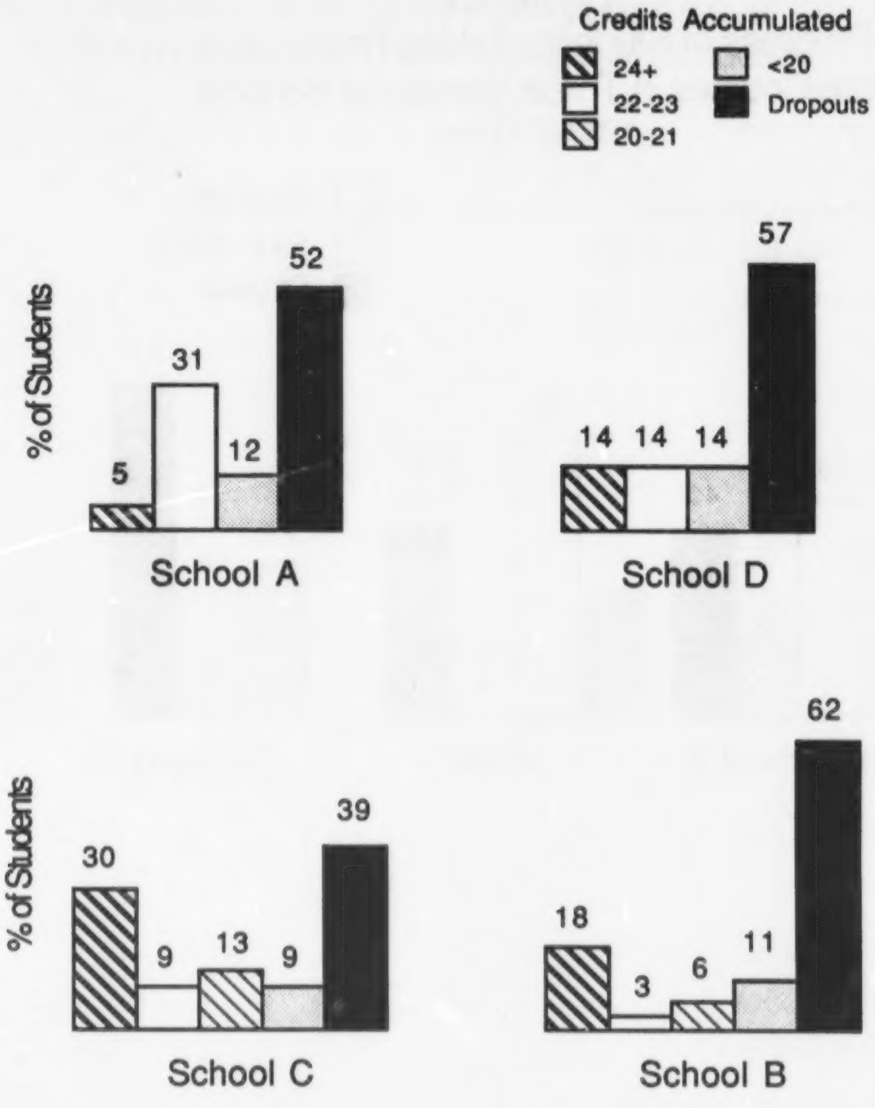


Figure 5.3
Progress of Students Taking Basic-Level Core Courses in Three Vocational Schools
1983-87 Cohort

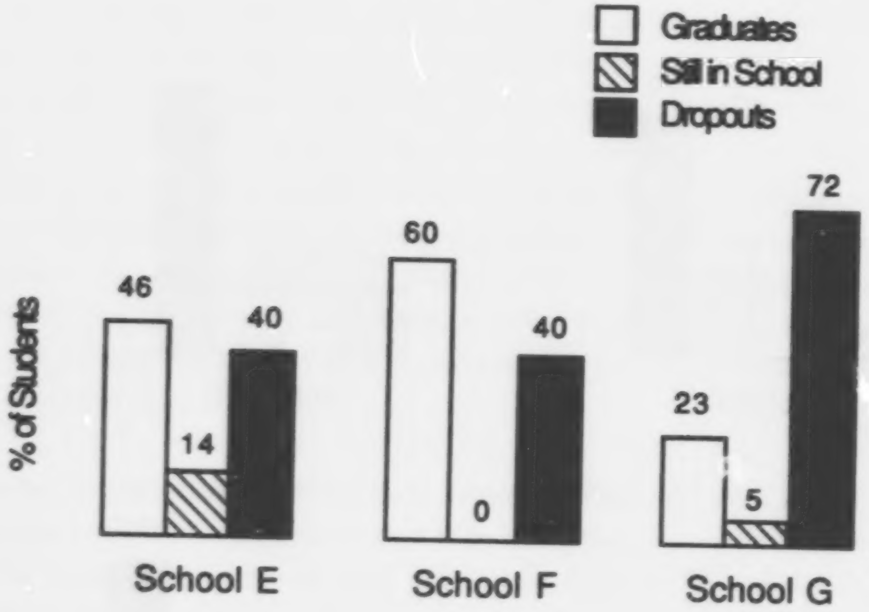
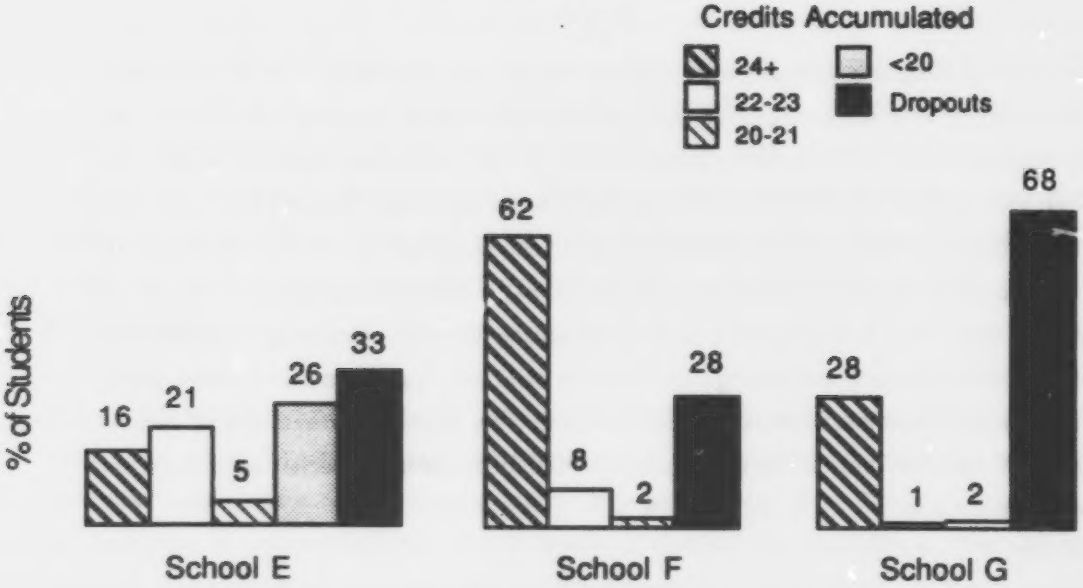


Figure 5.4
Progress of Students Taking Basic-Level Core Courses in Three Vocational Schools
1984-87 Cohort



E. PROGRAM APPROACHES

Despite the cliché that every school is a unique amalgam of its student population, staff, and the social, economic, and geographic milieu in which it finds itself, the consequences of that fact still manage, occasionally, to surprise. No two schools visited were dealing in the same way either with Basic-level programming or the students who take it.

The first common characteristic noted was that no matter how they had responded to the needs of these special students, all staff involved believed that they were acting in the best interests of the students. Another was the degree of commitment and dedication shown by the teachers involved. Principals told of their efforts in spite of declining enrolments and accompanying cuts in staff, to see that the programs were staffed by teachers who were knowledgeable and "who cared".

In examining the programs in these eight schools, it was clear that the long-time philosophical argument over the relative merits of integration versus segregation for students with special needs had not disappeared or been subsumed in the voice of reason; adversaries have just ceased trying to convert one another. Two of the four vocational schools visited are relatively new, implying a belief in segregation. This is not necessarily the case: one of the schools, School H, started with a student population 40 percent of whom were taking mainly General-level courses and the rest mainly Basic level. This was designed to provide scheduling flexibility, cross-program accessibility, and integration in a geographical setting. On the other hand, the largest vocational school, School G, is based on the belief that segregated Basic-level program schools can provide special services, including staff, facilities, understanding, and opportunities not available to special needs students in the composite schools.

The program in the smallest vocational school, School E, an all boys' school, is designed with minimal flexiblity, no choices at all in Grades 9 and 10, and a choice of three of four optional vocational courses in Grades 11 and 12. The principal allocates the fourth vocational course to each student.

In three of the composite schools, Schools A, B, and C, the avowed philosophy is to offer as much integration as is beneficial for the student. A deliberate effort is being made by the administrators of these schools to treat Basic-level programming as "just another set of courses among many". As enrolments decline, however, the degree to which they have found it possible to implement this flexibility of courses has varied. The degree of choice that they have been able to give students has been limited. In School A, for example, Basic programming is essentially one large package, with students in Grade 9 choosing 8 credit courses from a list of 9 and Grade 10 students choosing 8 from a list of 10. In Grades 11 and 12, no choices are available and half-time co-operative education is compulsory.

In one of the smaller composite schools, School D, the Basic-level program has been one complete package with no choices available at all. The present principal is in the process of moving towards some integration with the mainstream of the school by having the counselling done by the guidance department instead of the head of the Basic program.

Although in the OSIS document only three levels of program difficulty were recognized, Advanced, General, and Basic, it is clear that, by and large, school staff are still sorting students into at least four levels of program difficulty, Advanced, General, Basic, and Modified. Where student numbers and perception of needs warrant, schools are offering basic program classes at several levels. The composite school, School B, with the largest number of students (190) taking Basic-level courses, streams incoming students into four levels, depending upon their achievement in reading and mathematics. In addition, there is a Senior Special Education class for students working at the "educable retarded level". Even one of the smaller composite schools, School C, with only 70 students enrolled in Basic-level programming at all grade levels offers two programs: Basic and Basic-Modified.

The largest vocational school, School G, with approximately 600 students, asks students to choose (with some guidance) whether they will take each of their academic subjects at a basic or "remedial" level. (In this school, a few academic subjects are given at the Grade 10 General level for the benefit of the few students who will transfer to General-level programs in other schools.) School F, which exercises very strict control over the admission of students, offers two levels of Basic programming in Grades 9 and 10, plus a "Living and Learning Program" for students described as "educable retarded".

The newest vocational school, School H, has about 40 percent of its students taking some General-level courses. Staff there, too, have found it necessary to provide a "special Basic" program in addition to the "regular Basic" program. Staff anticipate that students taking this special program will probably not graduate.

It is suggested in the OSIS document that the Grade 9 program should provide some opportunities for exploration. In one of the composite schools, School B, all Grade 9 students rotate through an exploratory package of six options: visual arts/family studies/computers/French/ business/dramatic arts, (total 2 credits). One- and two-credit shop rounds are also available; one is labelled "a female perspective". The school began with only one non-traditional course for girls; now there are seven. One of the smallest composite schools, School C, tries to provide some opportunities for exploration by having an industrial arts course at both the Grade 9 and 10 levels in preparation for the carpentry and machine shop courses offered in Grade 11. Keyboarding, record-keeping, or visual arts are also available for Grade 9. In Grade 10, Introduction to Computers and Living on Your Own (family studies) are added. Even the two composite schools, Schools A and D, each with a program described as "one big package", provide experiences in more than one technological studies area. School A has a carpentry facility plus a multi-studies facility with a combination of sheet metal work and auto-servicing. School D gives experiences in five technological studies areas: welding, machine, auto, wood, and restaurant services plus a girls' general technical course.

The advantage of the three large vocational schools is, of course, the variety of vocationally oriented courses that they have to offer; the newest, School H, has over twenty-five. Students in junior grades may choose to explore four areas (two pairs of two related courses). At this time, two packages, child care and fashion arts have been formed; a theatre arts package awaits completion of the community theatre to be attached to the school. The largest of the vocational schools, School G, organizes its programs into four areas: technical, hairdressing, business education, and family studies. During the first two years, it is possible for a student to rotate through all thirteen of the technical areas; but during Grade 10, students complete option sheets that are specific to one of the four areas. (Provision is made for cross-over and it would seem that the subdivision of four areas is more a device for sharing administration duties than a restriction for students.)

One of the more successful programs in vocational Schools F, G, and H is hairdressing because students are able to complete most of their apprenticeship hours while at school, although sometimes this means remaining at school for a part or whole of a fifth year. A comparative newcomer to the list of Basic program options is Introduction to Computers or Computer Literacy. Five of the schools offer this course at the Basic level. School A offers it in Grade 9, Schools E, G, and C offer it in Grade 10, and School D offers it in Grade 11. School F does not mention a computer course in its calendar, but it did have a new computer room with ten computers to be used with other courses. A paragraph in the calendar of School H states: "Although there are no specific computer studies courses included in this program booklet, there will be many chances for students to learn about and use computers in the school."

Extensive use is also now being made of the family studies guideline as a basis for preparing both male and female students for their roles as adults. Vocational School G offers nine courses: they range from the traditional studies in foods and nutrition, textiles and clothing, to early childhood education, as preparation for parenthood as well as for further education at the post-secondary level. Changing roles of women, the wide range of family forms and the multicultural nature of today's society are highlighted throughout. (Co-op is available in child care in Grade 12.) Another vocational school, School F, also makes extensive use of both family studies, child care, and nursing assistant programs for a total of ten courses. The child care program leads into a "mothercraft" course financed by Employment Canada. It is significant that the all boys' vocational school also offers a life skills program in "Junior Shop". School H offers a personal services package in both Grade 9 and 10 based upon child care and family studies (foods and nutrition) plus cosmetology.

The largest of the composite schools, School B, also makes extensive use of family studies which is one of the subjects in its Grade 9 exploratory round. It offers a total of nine Basic-level courses in a suggested four-year Basic-level planning guide. In the other composite schools use is not so intensive: School A offers a two-credit family studies course in Grade 9 but no others thereafter; School C offers Living on Your Own at both the Grade 10 and 11 Basic levels, and School D offers Life Skills at Grade 12.

Only two of the vocational schools and none of the composite schools provide music courses at the Basic level. The range of courses offered at School G is substantial: instrumental, band, voice, and guitar are among the 12 fine arts (including television arts) courses provided. In all of the four composite schools, there are music courses available, but none are offered at the Basic level. At one school, music is only offered to students at the Advanced level.

F. SEQUENCING AND PACKAGING OF COURSES

The writers of OSIS (p. 21) suggest that "Ideally a student's program should possess coherence, continuity and balance." They suggest further that continuity can be achieved by combining courses that follow a "logical sequence over time and allow the principles and concepts acquired in one course to be applied to other courses." Most of the schools' staffs have obviously given a great deal of thought to this problem of sequencing and skill development and the complementary idea of "school-related packages" (p.23).

The smallest vocational school, School E, has only eight technological studies facilities, but all Grade 9 and 10 students rotate through them; students are then able to continue with the courses of their choice, (three out of four) through Grades 11 and 12. School F provides courses at the Basic level, Grades 9 through 12, in 17 industrial arts subjects. All academic subjects are also taught in Grades 9 through 12.

School G also provides related courses that together can form a four-year package plan in family studies, business, and cosmetology. Food services is a three-year program. Students who are not involved in one of the packages mentioned above, after rotating through the twelve available shops in Grades 9 and 10, choose two specializations for the entire Grade 11 year. They then choose two new specializations for the entire Grade 12 year. Each student will, therefore, have had at least two years in each of his or her chosen fields. Since many of the courses are related and many of the skills taught in generic fashion, it is anticipated that students will have marketable skills when they finish school. English, mathematics, physical education, and fine arts are also offered over four years.

In Grades 9 and 10, students at the newest vocational school, School H, may choose four of eight packages. They are free to choose the same packages the next year, or to explore further. Once they are in senior grades, the students will be able to take a largely vocationally oriented program. At present, in Grade 11, only two packages are offered in which all the vocational courses are related: child care and fashion arts. The staff are planning other packages, one of which is in theatre arts. It would consist of English, drama, art, music, and carpentry (set building). Work experience would also be available in set building, theatre lighting, and printing (programs and tickets). Staff here were also quick to point out that many of the skills they teach are generic.

The composite schools, with far fewer Basic-level students, have had to give much more thought to the issues of sequencing and packaging. School B (composite) with the most students in Basic-level programs (190), has also managed to provide for the sequencing of skills in a number of courses. English, business studies (keyboarding), family studies, mathematics, physical education, visual arts, and four technological studies courses are available over each of four years. The school calendar provides a flow chart, Planning Your Technical Program. It is anticipated that the technological studies courses will lead to jobs such as "service station attendant or mechanic's helper, carpenter's helper, sheet metal worker's or welder's helper, florist's or landscape gardener's helper". Additionally, special interest courses, such as Introduction to Computers, and drama, are offered over two years.

School A with a smaller population involved in Basic-level courses offers its academic courses Grades 9 through 12. It makes use of "multi-shops" in Grades 9 and 10 and then makes extensive use of compulsory co-operative education in Grades 11 and 12 to follow through with the skills begun in Grades 9 and 10. The administration of School C also attempts to provide sequencing in its small program by offering industrial arts in Grades 9 and 10, followed by relevant vocational courses in Grade 11. (No vocational courses at the Basic level are offered in Grade 12 as yet.)

One of the smaller composite schools, School D, with fewer than 50 students in its Basic-level program, has managed, by having bilevel classes, to offer five vocationally oriented courses: wood, auto, welding, restaurant services, and typing in each of Grades 9 through 12. A girls' general shop is also offered over four years. Only English, of the academic subjects, is offered in each of the four years.

G. CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION AND WORK EXPERIENCE

According to OSIS (p. 16), Basic-level courses are designed to focus on preparation for the world of work. "These courses should serve the needs of the student who may not participate in post-secondary education and provide a good preparation for direct entry into employment."

All the schools visited made some form of work experience available to students. Some staff members referred to it as "on-the-job-training". Only one of the eight schools, the newest, School H, permitted participation by Grade 9 students. Three others, Schools A, D, and F allowed for the placement of Grade 10 students, while the others restricted participation to students in Grades 11 and 12. In School D (composite), the work experience was regarded as an integral part of the program and participation was compulsory.

Most of the schools had caveats regarding who could participate, either stated in the school calendar, or indicated in interviews with the researchers. Such phrases as "those who qualify", "those who are recommended", or "those who will not let the school down" were used to ensure that only students who are ready for the experience and who would not disgrace themselves or the school they represent are actually sent out on work-experience programs.

Both for the student's sake and the school's reputation, a successful work-experience placement is seen by most schools' teachers to be a necessary prelude to a co-operative education placement. In one of the newer vocational schools, School F, the sequence is well articulated.

"The External Program consists of five parts: work experience, extended work experience, apprenticeship, co-operative education, and job placement." In practice this means that Grade 10 students go out for one, two-week work-experience placement during the school year and Grades 11 and 12 students go out for two, two-week periods. Furthermore, the in-school program is designed to complement and reinforce the work-experience program. At present, in that school, co-operative education placements are available in auto-servicing, child care, office practice, cosmetology, and foods. Also, it is possible for students to serve a hairdressing apprenticeship within the school.

In School H (vocational), as mentioned earlier, the students may be sent out for one, two-week work experience per semester, in any grade, including Grade 9. The choice is the student's, but the same proviso is there, that he or she not be on suspension, nor otherwise be someone who would not represent the school well. The co-operative education program in this school is in a fledgling state. Placements are very focussed and aimed primarily at preventing dropouts. Students spend two days a week on the job and three in school.

In the older vocational school, School G, "qualified" senior students may go out for one or two weeks, one or more times a year, for work experience in industry or business. Last year was the first year that co-operative education was implemented on a significant scale. About ten Grade 12 students got jobs as a result of their co-operative education placements. In addition, the school calendar lists two types of Linkage programs that are available: one for apprenticeships and one for community college work. At the present time, students have the opportunity to earn credit at school towards the following apprenticeships: cook, baker, meat cutter, machinist, construction or industrial millwright, and small appliance repairman. Linkage programs for mechanics, steamfitting and drafting are in the planning stage.

Vocational School E also restricts the opportunities for work-experience placement to recommended senior students. In addition, about a dozen students per semester are given co-operative education placements.

In one of the composite schools, School A, where no technological studies courses were offered at the Basic level after Grade 10, half-time co-operative education was compulsory from Grade 11 on. The lack of technical facilities was further compensated for through the use of a Linkage program with the local community college, whereby students were able to take classes in meat cutting, baking, bricklaying, and printing. Another small community composite school, School C, has a strong co-operative education program based on the Man in Society guideline offered at the Grade 11 Basic level. Next year they plan on offering the World of Work as a continuation. At present, any Grade 12 student needing a program strictly at the Basic level would have a very limited choice: only English is offered. However, individual co-operative education placements can be arranged. Students are also encouraged to take General-level vocational courses.

The staff of composite School D has transition to work as a main objective for these students. So strongly do staff focus on this that, a job, not graduation, is the goal of a program which consists of compulsory work experience in Grades 10-12, plus two co-operative education credits in each of Grades 11 and 12.

School B (composite), has only four students in co-operative education placements outside the school. Its strength, however, lies in the placements it has made within its own institution. Two Grade 12 students, taking Basic-level courses, who are good at carpentry were working as teacher's aides in a Grade 9 Advanced/General-level carpentry course shop.

Five other selected students were working as teacher's aides in the Trainable Mentally Retarded program.

The time patterns used for the co-operative education placements varied considerably from school to school. Some students spend half of every day for a whole semester in a placement; some spend three days in school and two on the job. One school has a more complicated formula, the first two weeks of the semester wholly in school, then four days out and one in for a total of thirty days: this is done twice during the year.

Schools also varied in their selection of co-ordinators. The smaller the number of students in the program, the more likely it was that there was no full-time co-ordinator.

Although co-operative education is still in its infancy, it is perceived by schools' staffs to be a solution to many problems. As a form of internship, it is a far stronger bridge to the world of work than the short-term "work experience". The staff of composite schools, worried about shrinking technical programs, and out-of-date facilities, see business and industry as replacing school facilities. Some spoke of co-operative education as a "life-saver" and referred to the improvements they saw in some students after a placement. On the other hand, concern for the preservation of good placements means that most co-operative education co-ordinators, whether full or part-time, are being very careful about which students they send out.

Many students have part-time paid employment, apart from school work- experience or co-operative education placements. One student mentioned that she did not like working and not being paid. A teacher remarked that he thought the placements were a little too long for these students. Yet they often hang on to their part-time jobs for several years. It is interesting to speculate why more use is not made of some of the job placements that students have found for themselves.

H. COUNSELLING

If one examines the four vocational schools first, it becomes apparent that effective counselling is believed to be the first line of defence against both impulsive dropping out and unwise career or personal choices. The need of students for counselling is universally accepted. When asked what their needs were, teachers made such comments as: "Oh, God! How many pages have you got?" "They are all special needs students. All need boosts to their self-esteem, it's non-existent. They have self-destructive behaviour patterns. They need security, they need money ... . There's none at home." "These students need social skills. They get into harmful peer groups and don't know how to get out." "They are the failures of the school system."

The largest vocational school, School G, has a strong guidance department that advertises its services in a very effective way in the student handbook with a two-page spread, complete with cartoons, stating that the guidance office is open every day from 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., and giving the many areas or topics, with which it could help, all done in large, easily read print. It also has a Guidance Home Form, varying in size from three to fifteen students, for students needing the support of a daily guidance period. The head of guidance is the chairperson of the support services team consisting of: the school psychologist, two social workers, a school nurse, a vice-principal, and the head of special education. The staff of the guidance department is seen by other teachers to be "very effective", "doing a good job", "excellent", "accessible", "really good people".

"Accessiblility" and "bending over backwards" were qualities that teachers and students also mentioned when speaking of the staff of the guidance departments in vocational Schools F and H as "really super". Students remarked that "they were very helpful and quite kind", "you can always get an appointment on that day", and "we get good service there". Teachers confirmed the latter perception. "If a student is in distress, they are available. It's an open-door policy. They are good and flexible." "They are open to students just walking in and talking."

At School H, however, one teacher voiced a concern: "Personal counselling jobs are very well done here, but career counselling is not. It is not well done anywhere ... but it will be in the future." His concern was shared by one teacher at School G, who also mentioned that the guidance people had to spend so much time on crises, personal problem counselling, and designing special programs, that sometimes they were overwhelmed and had insufficient time for career counselling.

Vocational School E, drawing from a largely middle-class population, has no guidance department. The principal and his two assistants are named, in the student handbook, as the "providers of personal counselling services". They are perceived by the staff to be "very committed". On the other hand, some teachers thought that if students had a problem, they might also choose to go to one of their favourite teachers for help. It was also interesting to note that staff believed that the absence of girls, in this school, meant that there was one less pressure on the boys.

The composite schools are divided in their approach to counselling for the students taking Basic-level courses. In Schools B and D, the only two schools where all students taking Basic-level programs had been processed through the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), counselling was not done by the guidance department. In School B guidance, course counselling and "strong emotional support" were provided by the six staff members of the special education department. Other teachers of Basic-level courses think that the special education staff "know the students inside out". They make a special effort to link the elementary and secondary system. However, the teachers in the special education department did appear to be overextended. About one-third of the school's students have been IPRC'd. (There are learning disabled, behavioural and other handicapped students in the school and some students fall into more than one category.) In School D, until now, the head of the Basic-level program has done all the counselling of students in the program. The principal is in the process of making some changes and each student has just been allocated a personal counsellor from the guidance department.

A counsellor at School D gave his opinion that there are some students "who are better off out in the work force". He suggested that schools need to organize a semester out and a semester in if that's what's best for the student.

> Some of the home situations are zoos. In ten years at this school, I have seen that the family has broken down. Students have to transfer to other schools to live with the other parent. Some can't live at home, yet they can't live on student welfare. There aren't places for them to board. Maybe if there were resource homes, that would help.

> If their father's a drunk and they're working, they quit ... and it is not because the school is bad. We need more counsellors.

The strongest counselling by a guidance department staff in a composite school was found at School A; indeed, one researcher reported that the most significant, most positive, and unanimous response was that related to the guidance department. Students and staff alike spoke highly of the understanding, patience, diligence, and accessibility of counsellors. Staff at this school also stressed the strong need that these students have for appropriate counselling: "They shoot from the hip, introspection is foreign to them. They need to express their emotions, yet, they are pretty forgiving."

The need for effective personal and career counselling for these students was universally accepted by all staffs. Students themselves recognized and appreciated good counselling when they received it. All valued accessibility, caring, and flexibility. Even students, who rarely chose to visit counsellors, were quick to remark on whether a counsellor seemed to be truly helpful. It did not seem to be important who actually did the counselling, whether it was someone from a special education department, the administration, or a guidance department; what mattered was that there was someone who cared and had the time available to listen. One student, in School F summed up her version of good guidance: "They get you to own your own problem and do something about it."

I. ATTENDANCE/DISCIPLINE/CODE OF CONDUCT

While regular attendance is typically viewed by educators as fundamental to success at the Basic level, not all schools strongly reinforce this requirement. Mention is made of the need for regular attendance in most of the calendars or student handbooks of the schools studied: often the words from the OSIS document are used (p. 35). In the event of unavoidable absence, the procedures to be followed are also made clear. Parents are requested to phone the schools if their son or daughter is to be absent. If they have not telephoned, then the student must bring a note from home upon return to school. In most schools, the attendance secretary will telephone the homes of students who are absent, either on the same day or the next. Usually, there is some form of signing out for students wishing to leave the school during the school day. Notes from home usually have to be provided for medical appointments and such. The principal of School G believes that poor attendance and failure go hand-in-hand and has targeted attendance as a major concern: they are doing their utmost to deter students from skipping. This school even has a night phone-in system so that parents can phone in about absences, lateness, and other student behaviour concerns. The staff adhere strictly to a school-wide system of detentions for skipped classes, as is the case in School F.

Lunchtime detentions are also assigned for skipped classes in School H. After three skips, parents are informed; after four skips, the student is seen by the head of special services; after five skips, the student is seen by the vice-principal. Options considered are: internal suspension, counselling, parent interview, timetable changes, co-operative education or work experience.

Composite School A also uses a progression of deterrents. After five absences, the student must be interviewed; there is the option of sending a letter home. After ten absences, a parent interview is necessary, and after fifteen absences, there will be a recommendation that the student be withdrawn from that class.

School B had the usual statement on attendance in the student handbook; however, there was neither an outline of procedures to be followed nor any statement on the consequences of not following them. School C gives in the course calendar a quote from OSIS which implies that all of the above procedures will be followed by the school:

> Where attendance has been identified as an essential component of a course and where a student, with his/her parents, has been appropriately counselled and provided with support and direction to promote regular attendance in the course, and where the student is still unwilling to attend regularly, such a student will normally fail to achieve credit for the course. (p. 35)

In School D, with a small Basic-level program, the usual contacting of the home by the attendance secretary takes place for regular absence. At the first sign of skipping, the parents are contacted by the teacher. Missed time has to be made up with that teacher. After skipping more than one class, students are seen by the head of the department and the parents may be contacted by the head. Truancy may result in suspension from school or, for those under 16 years of age, referral to the county attendance officer.

Codes of Conduct are required by OSIS under Section 23 of Regulation 262, Elementary and Secondary Schools and Schools for Trainable Retarded Pupils. Each of the schools visited has enunciated a clear code of student behaviour. Where the schools differ is in the prominence that they give to the code and the sections of the code that they choose to emphasize. One element is common to all of the schools in their dealings with students in Basic-level programs; as summed up by one of the staff at School G, "We are very structured. They know the rules. We keep telling them. They like the structure." In Schools E, F, G, and H, copies of the code are given to every student on arrival. In the student handbook at School F, every contingency is covered, from unacceptable T-shirts, to inappropriate language, from hair nets to chefs' hats, and gym shoes. Student pride in the school building is stressed; all students sign a pledge to keep the school clean and in good repair. In School G, the behaviour code is available in several different languages. In the student handbook, only the dress and smoking codes merit a mention. In School H, the five-page leaflet, "What every student needs to know about ..." outlines the discipline policy, behaviour expectations, and other policies.

At School G, there is immediate suspension for racial harassment. Staff hasten to add that there are few racial incidents in the school, but occasionally one spills over from the community. Staff of the only composite school with a multicultural student population, School A, also mentioned, "We do not condone intolerance. Students must show respect to their peers." In this same school The Students' Guide and Code of Behaviour is printed on three pages of cardboard and covers everything from rights and responsibilities to corrective measures and final mark calculation. As in the vocational schools, staff here, leave little room for the use of "I didn't know." A sign of the times is that the first item in the code deals with alcohol and drugs.

Another school using a piece of durable, three-holed cardboard for its individual copies of the code is School D. The head of the Basic-level department handles discipline for all students in that program. In School B a special assembly is held at which students are introduced to the code. Since all students are bussed in, detentions are given at lunchtime. This school has the added feature of a "behaviour room" where students may go for a cooling-off period. "We don't send students to the office. We do lots of informal counselling before problems arise." At School C a key staff member is the learning resource teacher. Last year he organized a series of meetings with all the teachers of Basic-level subjects. More consistency was their aim. They drew up a new code and agreed on consistent consequences for students in the Basic-level program. One of their innovations was to allow students to leave the classroom for a few minutes; a device that is similar in purpose to the "behaviour room" of School B.

J. SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE/CLIMATE

The atmosphere in all four vocational schools is uniformly one of warmth, friendliness, and much purposeful activity. All use flowers and plants and colour to advantage. Three of them, Schools F, G, and H are very much "show places" for their boards. Both students and staff share and show that pride. As mentioned elsewhere, all four schools have staff with a great deal of commitment to both the students and the purposes of the school. The administrators in all four schools believe that they have far less vandalism than other schools.

The motto of School H is, "You can because you think you can." The fact that this is a new school is viewed positively by both students and teachers. It is seen as providing all with a chance to change, a chance to begin again, and to innovate. Students are given the message: "You are worthwhile. This beautiful new school has been built for you. You are not at the bottom of the heap."

The other schools may not have the same motto as School H, but their basic philosophy is identical: convince the students that they can, and they will. This philosophy of positivism is taken very seriously by the staff and to some degree by the students. At School G for example, the morning announcement time is used to foster school spirit and to encourage each student to begin the day by thinking about his or her reasons for being in the school. "I am a responsible student, I want to be a winner, I want to be proud of myself." Run by the vice-principal, the announcement time, accompanied as it is by what is almost a homily, becomes a time for an "examination of purpose" by both staff and students. Observers noticed a great deal of friendly student/teacher interaction in the hallways. "Hope you're in a good mood today, sir." "Is your foot better today, sir?" and so on. When asked about the climate of the school, teachers responded, "I think we treat the students as human beings--not as inferiors; we make them act as ladies and gentlemen rather than treating them as children." "I came here in September. I find a good "gung-ho" attitude on the part of both students and staff."

A talk with four students who had come back for a fifth year at School F yielded: "We love the school, love the social life, love the work." "Last year I went to leadership camp." "We're really involved." "This school is like one big happy family." "These four years have been the best years of my life." The feeling that school was like a "family" was echoed by students and staff at School E.

Each of the composite schools is interesting in its own way; each reflects strongly the milieu in which it finds itself. The researchers described School A with such words as "artistically pleasing", "spacious", "dynamic", and "truly composite". In addition to Advanced, General and Basic programs, two classes for gifted (IPRC'd) are provided. Designated as the "French Immersion" program centre for the board, the school also has about one hundred students of Native ancestry and some Black and Oriental students. One researcher reported: "To observe the interaction of students and teachers, in the halls, the cafeteria and elsewhere, in a comfortable, informal, self-directed manner was a pleasure." Here, as in all the schools visited, students were most courteous and friendly to the visitors and answered questions with candour.

School B is also described as a "pleasing", "dynamic" school; the only school within its board that has an expanding technological studies program. The same warmth and friendliness were observed. The school cafeteria is open for breakfast and both students and staff eat there. Needy students can be helped. Here the principal and senior staff are committed to the concept of integration. (Even commencement is integrated, prizes are announced in alphabetical order, "People found that they couldn't tell the difference between the groups; now everyone comes to commencement."

In School C, the "dynamism" comes from the opening of this small school to the whole community. About one hundred adults, including a seventy-year-old woman in her fourth year of woodworking and a severely handicapped man also attend the school. The man, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, is employed part-time in the special education resource room. The elderly woman said that she "loved the school". In spite of these attempts at community integration, some teachers perceived that students in Basic-level programs are still stigmatized by students in other programs, but one of the more senior staff remarked that those who have been here a long time notice the changes for the better; those who have only been here a short time, see only what needs to be improved.

School D was designed as an open-concept (open space) school when it was opened seventeen years ago although much of the space is now closed. Although faced with a decline in enrolments and a highly mobile population, the school staff still manages to maintain a dynamism by providing, beyond the Advanced-, General-, Basic-, and Basic-modified programs, an enrichment program for gifted students. Pleasant and well-kept, the school has also opened some of its facilities to the public; the library, in particular is shared. There is segregation of the Basic-level students but no open rivalry or unpleasantness. The administrative staff confirm that this is their aim--a friendly, caring place to learn.

K. ROLE OF THE IPRC PROCESS

IPRC refers to the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee of a school board. The committee usually involves a school or board psychologist, special education or resource teachers, guidance counsellors, and key personnel from the board office. It designates the needs of individual exceptional pupils and recommends special programs for each. The percentage of students IPRC'd before admission to a full program of Basic-level courses varies from school to school. Only one of the vocational schools, School F, had strict admission policies: all students must either have been recommended for admission by an IPRC or have been through the school's own selection procedures which include the WISC (Wisconsin reading test), an achievement assessment, an age requirement (more than 14.5 year on entry), recommendations from the elementary school staff, and parental consent to the placement. On the other hand, in School G, "only English as a Second Language and special education students have to be IPRC'd for staffing purposes." Admission of other students has been made in consultation with the elementary school staff and parents. Most have not passed Grade 8; many have a history of truancy and trouble-making; some are "dumped" here; the overwhelming majority belong here. (This is the school with some special General-level courses for students that they think should be transferred back to General-level programs in other schools.)

School H which began recently with a 50:50 ratio of students taking Basic- and General-level courses (now at 60:40), places great reliance upon the recommendations of the elementary school staffs. This year, for the first time, guidelines are being set. (To be able to take the General-level courses, for example, students will now have to have passed Grade 8.) This year, approximately one-third of the students in the school have been legally designated "exceptional" through the IPRC process of the board. At School E, staff also rely on the recommendations of the Grade 8 teacher. This school, which is in a large industrial city, also has geographic and age limitations. Students must be at least 14 in their year of entry. Like most schools, the staff also require parental consent.

In the largest and one of the smaller programs, in composite Schools B and D, all students taking a full Basic-level program have a recommendation from an IPR Committee that they do so. Both of these schools also have more than one level of basic programming. In School A, it was admitted that "heavy reliance" is placed upon the recommendations of the elementary school principal. Some teachers here suggested that to some extent the Basic-level program is still seen by others as a "dumping ground" for behaviour problems. The ratio of males to females is about 2.5 to 1. This was the only school in which a counsellor reported that they hold about 25 IPRC meetings a year to "de-exceptionalize" students. In School C between 30 and 40 percent of students taking Basic-level programs have been through an IPRC.

For the one-third of the students in Basic-level programming who have been through the IPRC process, it is probably fair to say that there are likely to be additional handicapping conditions present: an acute behaviour problem, a learning disability, or another physical, intellectual, or communication exceptionality. This also means, however, that about two-thirds of the students in Basic-level programming have not been identified as "exceptional". Included will be some students who suffer from disinterest, distractability, impulsivity, and some of the other traits incompatible with achievement in school. At least a few will have been "dumped there" as a judgement of "last resort". In the final process of assessing the retention rates of students in Basic-level programs, therefore, it will be important to remember what one vocational school vice-principal said, "We exist to solve the other schools dropout problems." In other words, the percentage of would-be dropouts retained is the most important factor. This concept will be equally applicable in small towns where all the Basic-level programming is being offered in one collector composite school.

In any case, it is important to note that the IPRC process is used differently from school to school with regard to students who take their courses at the Basic level. This variability contributes to substantial differences in the resources available to respond to the needs of such students.

L. REMEDIATION

It has been noted that students who take these courses at the Basic-level are typically far behind their peers in basic reading and computation skills. What effort do these schools make to upgrade students in these critical skill areas?

Each of the three vocational schools for which we have information approach remediation in different ways. On entering School G all students are allowed, after some guidance, to make a choice: that of taking either a remedial program or a Basic-level course in each of the academic areas. School F also has two levels of Basic programming but in addition has three differing types of remediation resource help available: academic skills, behaviour, and learning disability. This school also has several small classes of six or seven students who take all their academic work with the one core teacher.

In the largest of the composite schools, School B, wide variation in student preparation is managed by offering five levels of basic programming. In most of them, all the core subjects are taught by the same teacher. According to the school calendar, Basic-level academic courses give students an opportunity to "review and revise" academic skills. School A, with about 100 students in Basic-level programming, describes its Basic-level English and mathematics programs as "individualized remedial instruction". The smaller schools, Schools C and D, try to ensure that no stigma is attached to use of a learning centre by offering help to the gifted students in the same place. The staff at School D try to achieve the same result by not admitting any "behaviour problems" to the centre.

In summary, the following strategies are being used to deal with the need for "remediation": several levels of difficulty at entry are offered; ability groups are arranged within classes; resource teachers are available, resource services are offered, and one core special education teacher who has large blocks of "flexible time" to deal with individual students, is employed for all academic subjects. In at least two of the schools there has been an effort made to separate remedial problems from behavioural problems.

M. TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

Two things were most noticeable in the interviews with teachers in the vocational schools; their commitment to their students, and their strong collegial support. Most of the staff are not just highly motivated, they are where they want to be. In the vocational schools, there is more cohesion between academic and vocational teachers than is the case in composite schools. Teachers work together, as a team, often for long hours. New teachers are carefully socialized by the veterans. One teacher at School G said that she loved her school and the staff because they were a bunch of "raging eccentrics always willing to try things". This perception was shared by a teacher at School F who remarked that sometimes he felt that he was in "show-biz", he spent so much time preparing materials and gimmicks to keep his classes lively and interesting for students with short attention spans. An adverse consequence of this commitment was mentioned at School H, the newest, where one administrator mentioned that he was already worrying about "burn-out" in one or two individuals. In this school, interviewees described other staff as "phenomenal", the program as "fabulous", and the facilities as "incredible". "We chose to come here because we knew that the administration was committed and we knew their philosophy." This desire to be in a vocational school even applied to most teachers at the smallest, School E. A teacher at that school expressed the feelings of many other teachers in vocational schools, "You have to be a special teacher to survive here." An interesting point regarding suitability of teachers for the vocational schools was made by a teacher at School F: "We don't have to worry about poor or weak teachers. The kids are smart. They take care of that. They get rid of the dead-heads."

Most teachers in vocational schools saw their schools as the last formal educational opportunity for their students and themselves as "significant others" in the students' lives. A teacher at School G who reiterated that his was the "best Basic-level school in the city", and that the students were honest, off-the-cuff, and carefree, saw socialization of the students as the board's main thrust.

Another teacher at the same school thought that most students loved the school. "They are happy to go with teachers to museums, pioneer villages, pizza parlours, and so on. We have no vandalism here, no grafitti, nothing is marked up, not even books." Teachers perceive that student needs are being met. At School H they said, "Here they are successful; that is a new experience for most of them." At School F, teachers said, "They come in unruly, unkempt, socially unacceptable, uneducable, and unemployable. It's fantastic, by Grade 12 they are a different breed." A teacher at School F told of bringing his child to school if he is coaching after school and his wife is working, in order to show students a good family model.

Some teachers thought that the students occasionally moaned about the schools, but that if they went elsewhere for a while, they often asked to come back. A few teachers saw vocational schools as dumping grounds, as "necessary evils". A teacher at School H put it a little more positively, he thought that there were students in the Basic-level programs who could do work at the General-level if not for their behaviour.

There were some negative views expressed. One at School E said, "There's little lateral mobility", and "I'm tired of being second class." Yet another commented that the median age of secondary teachers for that board was 48. "We're aging. There's less volunteering." A teacher at School G thought that some problem students are given too many chances and they spoil the tone of the school. Another teacher in the same school thought that the need for very small classes for the special education students was having an adverse effect on class size in the remainder of the school.

Teachers varied in their perceptions of the effects of OSIS. Said one at School G, "It enrages me. It upset me terribly. The abolition of Modified is immoral." Another teacher at School H complained that he had been bumped twice because of it. Another technological studies teacher at composite School D blamed OSIS for changing his life. "We have less money, more needs. Have to do it or lose job. It's as simple as that. The philosophy is surviving. With the same resources, I went from teaching a single level to teaching a bilevel, multigrade shop." A teacher in composite School A thought that the OSIS requirement of the same 30 credits for students in Basic level was good for their self-esteem, it helped them feel the same. Another teacher in the same school, remarked that, initially, 30 credits seemed like something completely unattainable to the students. At School C, a teacher summarized a feeling also expressed elsewhere, "The 'front-end loading' (most required courses to be taken in Grades 9 and 10) that has occurred in the implementation of OSIS is horrendous. It has meant the death of 'tech'."

The teachers in the composite schools were not always complimentary about each other as were their colleagues in the vocational schools. Although they liked their schools, they were, however, quick to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their colleagues, especially the attitudes of colleagues whom they thought lacked the necessary empathy but were forced by policies of the system to teach the Basic level.

In School A one teacher described the students as "being in their own little world." "No one knows what they are thinking. Some are viewed with sheer terror by some teachers. Others don't pay much attention to them." A second teacher in the same school, although "not qualified to teach Basic", but doing so, said that the segregation of the program was a "good segregation that met the students' needs for life skills".

A teacher at School B was emphatic, "In my opinion, a large number of the students in Basic-level programs here are not intellectually slow learners; they are mainly behaviour problems. In a class of twenty, maybe fifteen are behaviour problems. It's very hard on the genuine slow learner." His comment was supported by a teacher from School A who remarked that it was more difficult to get into General level courses than into Basic. Another reflection of behaviour problems encountered was given by the teacher in School D who said, "My perception is that those poor little buggers have not broken into their faculties because Basic-level teachers are so concerned with discipline." Another teacher at this same school endorsed more forcibly, the rarely raised but implicit criticism of the elementary schools, "They have nine years in elementary school. You should look there. They are not getting the skills they should. I'm horrified that no research is being done at the elementary level."

Teachers at School B were among those who thought that these students needed more career counselling and that such counselling in most schools was still too "middle class" in its orientation. They say class size is a critical factor and the lack of suitable resources, particularly appropriate textbooks is a major constraint. They agreed with teachers in other schools that for many of these students, school is not a first priority, yet they enjoyed teaching the students, finding them to be highly appreciative of good teaching.

A fair self-appraisal, one that many school staffs could echo, was given by a staff member of the program at School C. "Of course, we have a long way to go. The program is not as good as we would like. Teachers who have been here a long time, see changes, the improvements, but those who have just arrived see only what is wrong." One sad note is that there are teachers of Basic-level courses in the composite schools who are there because of declining enrolments and who confess that they would rather not be associated with the program because of its low status.

In none of the schools visited was communication with parents raised to the level that teachers would perceive satisfactory. In School E they found that holding a "fish and chip supper" on parents' night had increased attendance. In School G the efforts to improve "community relations" were seen to be paying off. (See Community Perceptions, p. 90.)

It was the teachers' perception that with so many students working part-time, homework was one battle in which they did not need to be engaged. Of course, this is merely a rationalization in that at least as many Advanced-level students work part-time and homework is normally expected of them. In any case, homework is not commonly required of students in Basic-level courses.

N. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

Again researchers were impressed with the candour and friendliness of students in all the vocational schools. The newest vocational school, School H, offered some unique insights into student perceptions because a large number of the students in that school had been transferred in from other secondary schools. All had only positive comments to make about the school. They had a strong sense of pride in it, despite having to put up with comments from outsiders who asked, "Why are you going to that school for dummies and retards ... there are kids in wheelchairs there." Although many students in all four vocational schools mentioned that the thing they disliked most was the attitude towards them of students going to other high schools, a few of those same students in School F went on to attribute any problems with their school's reputation to students in the "Living and Learning Program" who are "weirdos". Students in Schools E and H seem to have fewer problems with self-esteem and perhaps not coincidently draw from a largely middle-class populaton. Students in School G all agreed (even one who used to tell no one that he went there) that their school's reputation is definitely getting better. This is clearly related to the Community Relations Program of the school. (see Community Perceptions, p. 90.)

Many transferring to School H admitted that they had expected the school to "be the pits" and were pleasantly surprised. "It's a great school, the teachers are friendly and mostly fair." A few saw bussing as a problem because it prevented them from seeing their friends. An interesting comment came from a quiet student who said that "not being a 'browner' and not being a behaviour problem, just being a kid in the middle, you just don't get any attention."

In all of the established vocational schools, Schools E, F, and G, students' attitudes toward the staff and their school were the same. With very few exceptions they saw the staff as interested, fair, willing to help, trusting, and caring of them as individuals. Student perceptions also seemed to grow more positive the longer that they had been in their particular school. Many Grade 9 students worried about their school's reputation as a "dummy school". They usually expressed the intention of working hard to get back into General-level programs. During ensuing grades, perceptions gradually changed to satisfaction with the school. In all three schools, students said such things as, "This is the best spot for me. I can learn a trade."

The ambivalence of the vocational school students towards their schools was shared by students in the composite schools when questioned about their programs. They did not like being thought of as "dummies" by students in other programs, yet they think that the program they are in is probably the best for them. They have a sense of security and the group identity is strong, but they resent being made to feel inferior.

Those in schools where a slightly packaged program was offered with little freedom of choice, such as School D, expressed some discontent at the lack of choice. Those who are allowed to cross over into other programs, such as School B, appreciate the opportunity. It was in the latter school that one of the researchers was approached and given a letter from two students who were afraid that they would not otherwise have a chance to give some input. Essentially, they wished to say how proud they were to be at School B where they could take English at the Basic level and mathematics at the General level, "If I had to go to a school just for Basic students, I would lose my confidence and I would feel I was 'to dum' (sic) and probably quit school. I feel that every high school should be like School B." Most students interviewed there thought that the teachers "pushed more" than in the elementary school and that as a result, their marks were better.

An interesting point to note is that students in all the schools perceived that teachers were fair and just in their marking, "If you are honest with yourself." Even when students criticized and said that some courses were boring or too easy, they tended to agree with students at School C who thought that, in spite of everything, high school was much better than elementary school. Students there described good teachers as caring, supportive, helpful, and able to explain well. The students wanted those who would give even more "individual treatment". If they were principal for a day they would get rid of all the "problem behaviour kids". Students at School A were unanimous in liking their principal, "She talks to us!" They were more condemning of some teachers. "It's pretty low, teachers treat you like dip-sticks." "Teachers are judging all the time. They are not here to judge; they are here to teach." "Some of them think that they know everything."

The degree to which these students personalize their resentments is also interesting. Generally speaking, whoever was responsible for discipline, particularly unauthorized absences or skipping, was perceived as "not very nice ... a nut ... or an old crab." In School D, where they had no choices in program, the head of department was seen as "running their lives." Some lack of adequate career counselling was demonstrated in the discrepancies between teacher and student perceptions of what jobs students were likely to obtain. Whether the student answers were partly hopes rather than expectations, it is difficult to say. Whereas students said that they would become mechanics, designers, policemen, and carpenters, the teachers would state mechanic's helper, gas bar attendant, and carpenter's helper. There was not the same degree of discrepancy in the answers of students and teachers when related to hairdressing or restaurant services.

Parental pressure is still a powerful force in preventing dropouts. Many students gave as a reason for not dropping out, "My parents would kill me."

O. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

The administration of only one school, School G, has established a definite plan to reach out into the community and encourage a positive image of the school. The community relations program, for which there is a co-ordinator, has made an effort to increase the involvement of students' parents who come from a large number of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The initial focus is on making parents feel comfortable in the school and explaining the expectations held for their children, and the focus continues to be spread into other parts of the community. Introductory meetings are held in several different languages; all written material (e.g., monthly newsletter) is sent home in a number of languages. Afternoon and evening meetings, attended by interpreters, are held regularly, featuring a variety of relevant topics, (e.g., former graduates describe their current career and how the school assisted them). Students are honoured for their achievements and coffee parties held for them and their parents. Students are encouraged to participate in fund-raising efforts for charity (e.g., food share, United Appeal). Another major thrust of the program involves direct interaction with members of the business community. They are invited to significant events such as their "Guest of the Month" activities. Effective communication is maintained with the local shopping centre administration and shopkeepers. Shop services such as hairdressing for seniors are provided; food services through the food preparation program are used by professional and community group meetings. A marketing committee publicizes school events such as Music/Drama night and Open House. A scrapbook is collected of all of the significant community events. As a result of efforts such as these, attendance both at parents' nights and activities for the community have risen dramatically. It has encouraged students and parents to take pride in their school. The school boasts the only alumni association that is active among special vocational schools, certainly among the four involved in this study.

The administrators of the two newer vocational schools, Schools F and H, are trying to avoid a negative relationship with the community; they do not send out into the community any student whom they think would give a bad impression of their school.

Since, almost without exception, the most unpleasant aspect of life for students in Basic-level programs is knowing that others think that they are in a school or a program for "dummies", it would seem that some public education program such as that underway at School G is almost a must.

P. SUMMARY

Students who take their courses at the Basic level are difficult to serve in secondary schools. They typically have a long record of school failure and disaffection: many look forward to age 16 when they can legally leave school. Any program designed to meet their needs must recognize the impact that their previous school experience has had on them.

We are not going to dwell on differences between composite and vocational schools in their comparative effectiveness in holding these students to graduation, but a brief summary might be useful. The segregated schools have better retention rates, more effective programs in preparing students for careers and adulthood, and a more student-centred school atmosphere. However, the vocational schools also carry a stigma that discourages students from enrolling and contributes to ethnic and racial stereotyping. Composite school programs for Basic level tend to be limited because of small numbers of students and few facilities, and they often involve teachers without special education qualifications and interest.

There are still schools that separate these students into more than one level of difficulty. We comment on the use of these levels and the IPRC process in the final chapter.

Virtually every program studied uses some form of vocationally oriented packages of courses in senior grades. Naturally, there is a greater variety of packages available in special vocational schools. The packaging is usually supported by exploratory sequences of courses in Grades 9 and

10. The primary focus of all Basic-level programming is career preparation. Some attention is usually given to life skills as well, but the general education approach found in Advanced-level courses is minimized.

The most effective programs incorporate a work-experience component in senior grades. This component is most viable when offered in the form of co-operative education credits. Educators in a number of schools are still uncomfortable about placing such low-ability, high-risk students in work situations because they fear that the students may jeopardize the reputation of the school. However, experience has shown that when a good relationship is established with employers, co-operative education experiences can be rewarding for all students in Basic-level courses.

In many of the Basic-level programs studied, special effort is made to provide students with individual attention. Wherever this is employed, it has the effect of making the students feel that their teachers are truly concerned about them and provides them with a stimulus to begin and maintain productive school work. It is also possible to go too far and make the students feel they are being patronized. Overall, programs are most effective when there is a supportive atmosphere in the school, encouraging full involvement in all aspects of school life.

Formal student evaluation in the form of tests and examinations is typically given less emphasis by teachers who work at the Basic level. They feel it is important to establish a series of successful experiences for these students. In order to do this, evaluation procedures typically emphasize attendance, work ethic, general attitude, and involvement. Tests and final exams are usually brief and make up a small part of a final mark in each course. These students have a tenuous link with the school. Obtaining 30 credits and graduating can seem pretty remote when there has been a tradition of failure. One or two early course failures in key subjects is likely to precipitate early withdrawal.

Counselling is particulary important for these students not only from the point of view of reinforcing school achievement, but also of confirming the relationship between courses and future careers. These students have to be closely monitored to ensure that the necessary support in the form of both concern and remedial services is available.

In none of the programs studied was the retention rate anywhere near that for students in the Advanced-level programs, but there were some that were substantially above the provincial norm for the Basic level. Certainly there is strong evidence that the dropout rate for students taking their courses at the Basic level can be reduced. Specific suggestions as to how this can be accomplished are presented in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER VI

GENERAL-LEVEL PROGRAMS

A. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we have selected a series of themes or aspects of school organization as a focus so that we may examine the way eight different schools respond to common challenges with regard to General-level programs. The approach we have taken in our analysis incorporates most aspects of school life in order to assess the impact of a specific innovation against the constraints imposed by the organization of the secondary school. The themes include philosophy, packaging of courses, co-operative education, attendance and evaluation policies, counselling services, and atmosphere or climate in each school. When educators speak of programs they are usually referring to combinations and/or sequences of courses that have general or specific career implications. The assumption behind the development of a program is that the content and teaching methodologies will act to motivate the students to learn. As we have seen in Chapter IV, the greatest concern we have about students who take their courses at the General level is a distinct absence of motivation. Some of these students will proceed to college, but the majority will go directly into the work force. How can the school deal realistically with the career goals that many young people have and still provide a broad, general education?

Our previous research has shown that even small adjustments in program, evaluation procedures, and school atmosphere can have a significant effect on students of lesser academic ability. What is the best way to combine the various elements of school programming to serve these students more effectively? The thematic approach was taken because we did not anticipate finding all aspects in one school of the most optimum means of responding to students' needs. In many secondary schools, certain procedures are well-entrenched (e.g., counselling by home form, co-operative education as career exploration). The logistics of making major changes often may seem too difficult, especially when the reasons for doing so are unclear.

Our analysis is premised on the assumption that remaining in school until graduation is good for both students and society.

B. WHO ARE THE STUDENTS/WHAT IS A GENERAL-LEVEL PROGRAM?

Most secondary schools use a computer-aided scheduling system for assigning each student to classes. Students then move from class to class individually, not necessarily in a group in the same grade or at the same level of difficulty. With this individualized system, students play a significant role in selecting their program of courses and it may help them gain satisfaction and progress. On the other hand, it also creates serious difficulties for a school to determine how well a student is meeting his or her goals and how well students are doing collectively.

One problem is identifying a student who takes his or her courses primarily at the General-level of difficulty; that is, what is a "General-level student?" Without a clear definition of each type of student to be served, it is difficult to define or create a program to serve their needs.

In this analysis we define the students at the General-level as those who take their core courses (i.e., English, mathematics, science, and history/ geography) at the General-level of difficulty. Grade 9 students usually take this level of difficulty because of the strong recommendation of their Grade 8 teachers (parents usually want their children to take mainly Advanced-level courses). Students who begin to take core academic courses at the General level in later grades usually do so because of low or failing marks. And so we have students starting out at the General level in Grade 9 and students who start out at the Advanced level who become General level by Grade 11 or 12. Because the system is individualized we also have other combinations.

OSIS states, "General-level courses should be considered as appropriate preparation for employment, careers or further education in certain programs in colleges and other non-degree-granting post-secondary educational institutions" (p.16). Some of these students will enter a community college after graduating from secondary school; however, their numbers are few. The vast majority will go directly into the work force. Teachers tell us that these students are: more likely (than Advanced-level students) to prefer a "hands-on" approach to a theoretical one; less likely to participate in extracurricular activities; more likely to be absent; less achievement oriented; likely to have a need for improved social skills; spontaneous; honest, direct and open; in need of positive reinforcement; and lacking good role models.

The needs of these students differ from those whose post-secondary aspirations are college and university and who take their courses mainly at the Advanced-level of difficulty. Since students taking mainly General-level courses will probably go directly into a job, they need to develop realistic career goals and to choose a set of courses that will best help them meet their goals. At critical times during the year they need career counselling consistent with their own strengths and interests. They need some realistic job experience (as opposed to part-time job experience) to help them arrive at their career decisions. Perhaps, most importantly, they need success in school, which means evaluation policies that will encourage them to remain in school so that they can be provided with the basic skills they will need.

The students who enter Grade 9 taking their core courses at the Advanced-level of difficulty and who transfer to the General level for these courses after Grade 9 or 10 may continue to take several of their courses at the Advanced level since some schools offer certain subjects at only one level of difficulty (e.g., physical education, art, music, drama, technological studies). Students with aspirations to enrol in certain college programs often take a mix of General- and Advanced-level courses, adding to the difficulty of designing programs for a group of students with specific learning characteristics. As well, there could be a confusion of purpose for some students. The direct goal for taking a certain combination of courses may not be reached by some and the destination after graduation becomes a serious question. There are students who take their courses mainly at the General level who, at the end of Grades 11 and 12, still have expectations of attending university.

The problems with designing programming for these students are complex, but there is a fundamental concern among educators that is leading to the introduction of a number of initiatives.

C. SELECTION OF EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS

The eight exemplary General-level programs were selected because of innovative approaches to at least one aspect of program, evaluation, or school atmosphere. In all eight schools there was special attention paid to students taking mainly General-level courses. This was done in the following ways: packaging of courses or specialization is the approach taken in two schools; evaluation of student progress is the philosophy in two more; and, an alternative program for potential dropouts and dropbacks is the innovation in two others. In the remaining two, one focussed on positive school climate and a clear emphasis on involvement of students in extracurricular activities and the other opted for early diagnostic techniques and delayed selection of level of difficulty. In all but one program the approach encompassed all General-level courses (Table 6.1).

TABLE 6.1
CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF GENERAL-LEVEL PROGRAMS

SCHOOL	STUDENT POPULATION	LOCATION	REASON FOR SELECTION
M	720	Suburb/large city	Packages, evaluation policy
N	960	Small town	Student-centred orientation
O	640	Medium-sized city	Magnet school, specialization in Grades 11/12
P	1,450	Medium-sized city	Co-operative education, work experience
Q	750	Medium to large city	Non-streaming in Grade 9
R	1,450	Medium to large city	Innovative approach to student evaluation
S	260	Suburb/large city	Individualized student program
T	1,400	Suburb/large city	Individualized student program

School M, a school of 720, was selected because it had recently established a General-level committee and developed a different approach to evaluation policies and teaching styles which were specifically designed for students taking courses at this level. There was a growing concern among both teachers and administrators that failure rates in General-level courses were too high. The school was given a unique opportunity by the board to staff its school with teachers committed to teaching students taking mainly General-level courses and was released from the staffing restrictions of redundancy and teacher surplus. One administrator with a vocational school background and special skills in staff development was hired. School M has also introduced program "packages".

School N has developed a clear philosophy about students taking mainly General-level courses with the support of strong administrative leadership and an emphasis on a positive atmosphere and school climate. An extensive extracurricular program has been developed to support a positive school climate. Our previous studies indicated that student and teacher satisfaction were well above the provincial norm. We included this school to determine if a highly positive school climate influences student retention.

We selected School O because it had recently been designated as a magnet school with technological and business specializations at the General level for students in the senior division (Grades 11 and 12). This program is a reflection of the board's new philosophy of providing a diversity of programs to meet students' needs at all three levels of difficulty without geographic boundaries. As the only specialized school which came to our attention in our search for exemplary

General-level programs, it was very important to include it in our sample. Does specialization enhance the school experience for students, leading to higher success and retention rates?

School P, a composite school of 1,450, is an example of a school with an extensive co-operative education program which involves 300 community employers. The two county boards of education (public and separate) give very strong support to the 12 schools that participate in the program. The aim of School P's head of co-operative education is to have co-op across the curriculum; at the present time students receive co-operative education credits in science, physical education, English, family studies, geography, French, computer mathematics, business, art, music, and community services. In many ways School P is typical of a large composite school in a medium-sized city. Examining the special features of the school should provide information that could be applicable to other General-level programs in the province.

School Q, a French-language school of 750, was recommended for its attention to General level even though the innovations are still being developed in several areas. In Grade 9, students are combined in heterogeneous classes for the first six weeks of school before core course choices of General or Advanced level of difficulty are selected. Teachers of General-level courses have periods scheduled for planning curriculum, program evaluation and special activities. The teachers have access to one of the few board-based General-level consultants in the province. Through the diagnostic testing done in Grade 9, early recognition of dropouts is attempted and remediation activities carried out. For later identification of potential dropouts, an alternative program is designed, which can include co-operative education.

The Teaching to Pass philosophy is becoming a popular approach to teaching students who take mainly General-level courses. (See Chapter IV for discussion of Teaching to Pass in comparison with other approaches to student evaluation.) The approach incorporates changes in evaluation and methodology that give strong emphasis to work-related responsibilities (e.g., attendance, work ethic). We chose School R because Teaching to Pass was in its third year of operation there. The student data from this school were especially important to include in our analysis of credit accumulation and dropouts. It allowed us to assess the effects of the evaluation emphasis on non-academic matters, on course success rates as well as on student retention.

A suburban school board has implemented an alternative program designed by a vice-principal called "School Within a School" (SWIS) in six area schools. We chose to examine this program in two schools, School S (population 260) and School T (population 1,400) to identify the differences in implementation and effectiveness in schools of different sizes. The program is aimed at students who are at high risk of dropping out and consists of one-half day at school (2 credits) and one-half day spent in a paying job (2 credits) for a maximum of four credits per semester. The in-school component consists of two courses of the student's choosing (one of which may be a correspondence course or an "Independent Learning Unit"). Administrators are highly involved in implementing the program. This program gave us the opportunity to look at how students respond to a "tailor-made" program, which focusses on the individual.

D. PROGRAM RETENTION AND CREDIT ACCUMULATION

Ultimately, each innovation must be judged by its success in retaining students to graduation. To set the scene for the program details that follow, we carefully examined student progress toward graduation in those schools where the innovation has been in place for a sufficient period of time.

In order to compare pre-OSIS and OSIS credit accumulation, dropout and graduation rates, we examined the 1983-87 and 1984-87 cohorts of original Grade 9 enrolees taking mainly General-level courses in four schools (M, N, P and Q). Since this is only the fourth OSIS year, we can only estimate retention rates by comparing the two cohorts for those years. In School R we examined the 1984-85 and 1985-86 cohorts to see if the effects of the program (Teaching to Pass), which began in 1984, had any observable effects on retention and credit accumulation. (We did not gather school-wide data from School O, only in its second year of specialization, or Schools S and T whose programs were limited to small numbers of students.) For purposes of comparing the four programs with provincial norms, we will use a dropout estimate of 40 to 50 percent for students who take mainly General-level courses throughout their years in school.

In the 1983 General-level cohort (Figure 6.1), School P has the highest dropout rate (46%) and School N the lowest (31%). However, School N also has the highest number of students still in school after four years. If we consider those still in school as being at high risk of dropping out before graduating, the dropout rate would rise in all the schools, but more substantially in School N and School Q.

A similar pattern can be seen in Figure 6.2 with Schools N and Q having the lowest dropout rates by the third year (26% and 18%), but also having the highest number of students who are most at risk of being unable to attain sufficient credits to graduate in four years (51% and 49%). In fact, in School N only 22 percent of the students have 22 or more credits after three years. With 30 credits needed to graduate, their graduation rate is likely to plummet to half that of the 1983 cohort. The

Figure 6.1
Progress of Students Taking General-Level Core Courses in Four Schools
1983-87 Cohort

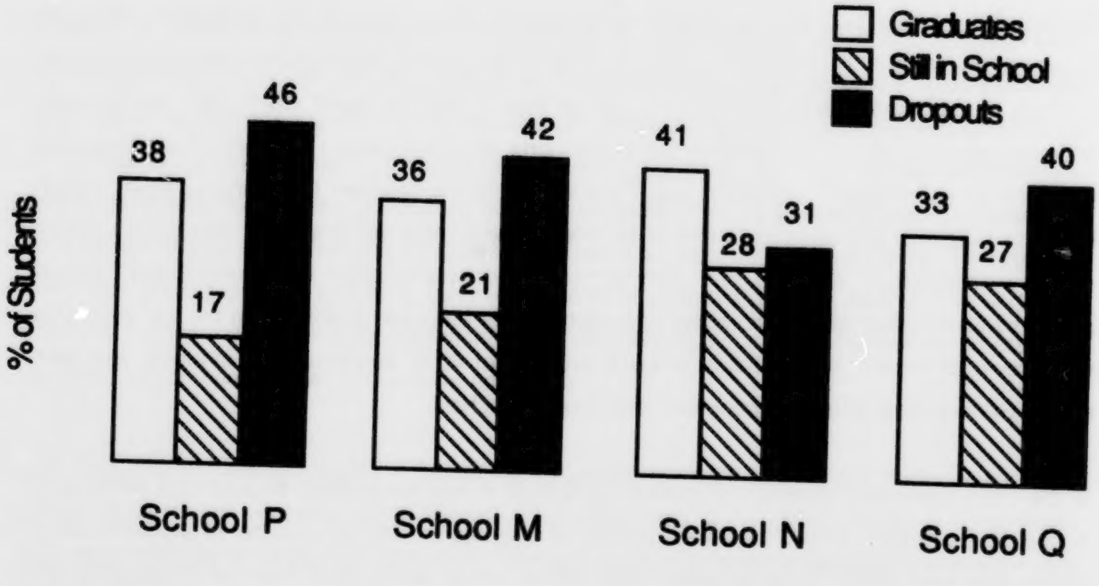
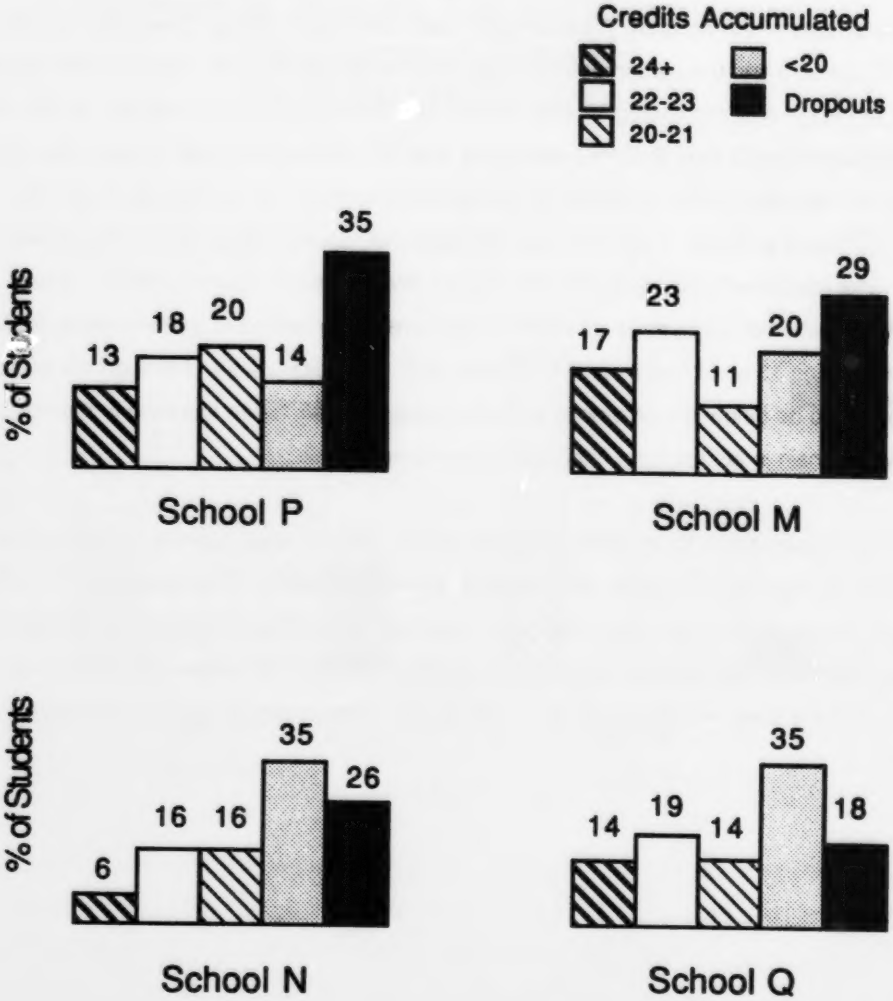


Figure 6.2
Progress of Students Taking General-Level Core Courses in Four Schools

1984-87 Cohort

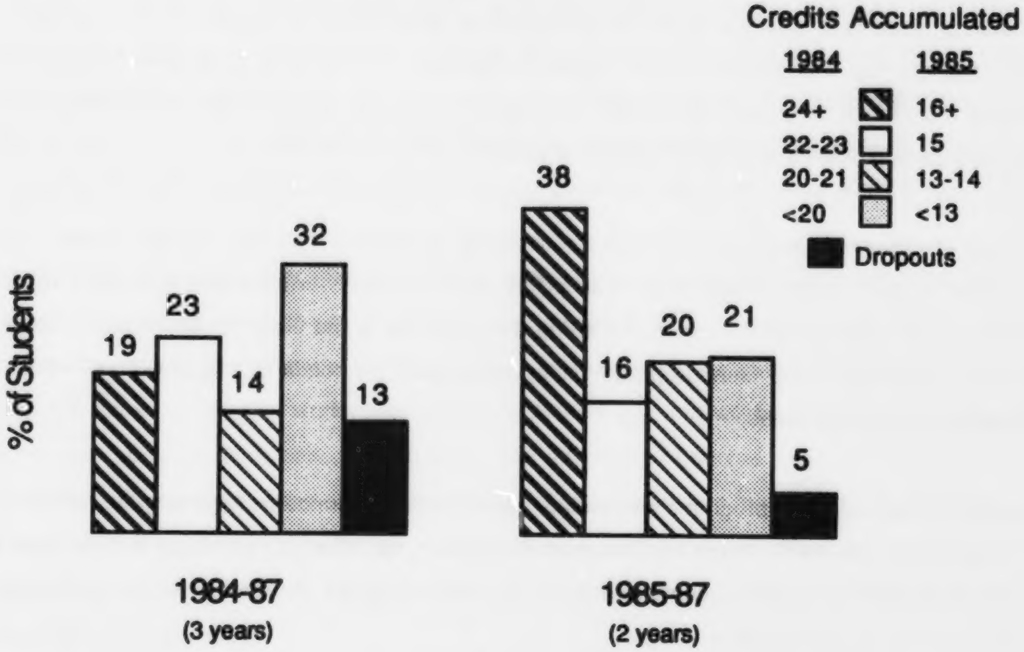


graduation rates in Schools M and Q will remain approximately the same only if all students who have at least 22 credits are successful in accumulating up to eight credits; this is unlikely to happen in every case. The high percentages of students who have fewer than 20 credits in each of the four schools makes it very likely that the dropout rate for the 1984 cohort will increase significantly.

When we compare the 1984 cohort from School R (Figure 6.3) with the other four schools, we can readily see the effects of the program (Teaching to Pass) after three years. Their dropout rate is the lowest at 13 percent and the percentage of students on target (22 or more credits) is the highest at 42 percent (although only slightly higher than School M). There is concern, however, for the high percentage of students in School R (32%) with fewer than 20 credits after three years. The credit accumulation for the 1985 cohort in School R is very encouraging: 38 percent have at least 16 credits after two years and only 5 percent have dropped out, approximately half of the provincial dropout rate after two years for students who began and remain in General level. There is, however, still a substantial percentage of students who are falling behind in accumulating credits, with 20 percent having 13 or 14 credits and 21 percent with 12 credits or less. Although the dropout rate may continue to be below the provincial average, there will likely be an increase in the number of students who remain in school for a fifth year if they remain at all.

The results of new approaches to students who take mainly General-level courses in these schools may be reflected in credit accumulation analyses of more recent cohorts. The trend toward a lower dropout rate in School R does give some indication that new approaches to student evaluation can help to retain students. Provincially, however, if students continue to accumulate credits at the same rate as we have seen in Schools P, M, N, and Q, the dropout rate is bound to increase.

Figure 6.3
Progress of Students Taking General-Level Core Courses in School R
1984-87 and 1985-87 Cohorts



E. PROGRAM APPROACHES

Until recently, the majority of attention in secondary school programming was given to those students taking their core courses at the Advanced-level of difficulty who would go on to university. Schools often measured their "success" by the number of their students who were accepted into university. Teachers, on the basis of their own university-oriented school experience, felt it was their job to impart "academic knowledge" and preferred to do so in Advanced-level courses. Many teachers still have a strong university-preparation orientation and openly admit they prefer teaching Advanced-level courses. Being assigned to teach these courses is often seen as a "reward" for seniority or position (e.g., head of department); young teachers are often assigned to teach the General- or Basic-level courses which are perceived as more difficult to prepare for and to teach. Many teachers feel it is easier to teach students interested in academic achievement, easier to measure a student's progress academically, and easier to see the results. They believe they have fewer discipline problems and more teacher satisfaction.

Although enrolments in secondary schools are declining, students are staying in school longer, and the range of their abilities is far wider than in the past. It was inevitable that educators would eventually turn their attention to students taking their courses at the General- and Basic-levels of difficulty. Both Basic and General programming have been the focus of a spate of workshops, newsletters, and committees.

The philosophies of all the programs we studied reflect the recent concerns regarding the relevance of General-level courses. There has been an increase in the effort to rationalize the secondary school experience for these students in order to: (1) better prepare them for their post-secondary careers, and (2) to keep them in school.

Many schools responded to concerns about General level by setting up a General-level committee to try to analyze what was happening in their own school: what teachers' attitudes were toward students taking mainly General-level courses; why they were using certain evaluation policies; how courses were assigned; and, how teaching methodologies could become more relevant in General-level courses. General-level committees were active in Schools M, N, and P.

School R was one of the first schools in the province to implement changes in evaluation specifically for General-level courses. Strategies for teaching 76-minute class periods were developed; a simple but firm attendance policy was introduced called "5, 10, 15" and a different orientation to student evaluation was introduced. The approach was called Teaching to Pass. The initiators of the philosophy were certain that it was what was needed to help students taking mainly General-level courses become more successful in school, as well as in reaching their post-secondary goals. Teaching To Pass workshops have been presented throughout the province for the last two years.

The Teaching to Pass approach hinges on the recognition that the student assumes responsibility for attending class and completing his or her work. The hoped-for result is that the student will pass and, because he or she is successful, will remain in school. By creating an atmosphere for success, students are "invited to succeed". According to this philosophy, spending more time on the positives than the negatives results in higher self-esteem, satisfaction, and, ultimately, success. This fosters student co-operation and effort and lowers stress levels for all. Expectations are clearly defined and realistic; for example, a clear statement of the evaluation procedure is given at the beginning of each course and the consequences of absence from class made explicit.

There is a de-emphasis on academic weighting in evaluation in Teaching to Pass (although teachers will differ on the extent of de-emphasis), and an increase in a hands-on approach and an attempt to show the relevance of material from day to day. Most of these students will be going directly into the work force. Therefore, work-related responsibilities (i.e., what will be expected of them in the workforce) such as work ethic, social skills, and attendance become important components of evaluation. Re-testing is often used. Frequent quizzes and constant feedback to students become a part of the teaching methodology. Self-evaluation and peer-evaluation are also used, not necessarily to be included in the final mark, but with the aim of increasing self-awareness and developing thinking skills.

In School P, there is a strong emphasis on co-operative education as an approach to retaining students taking mainly General-level courses. Co-operative education is becoming available in more courses here than in any other program we studied. Although there is not a readily "identifiable General-level program," there is a heightened awareness of a need to tailor courses to the needs of these students.

School M's approach has been to "adapt teaching styles and evaluation policies to meet the needs" of students taking mainly General-level courses. Staffing the school with teachers who like and want to teach General-level courses has been a priority. They have tried to have clearly defined and realistic expectations, and to maintain a relaxed atmosphere (e.g., there are no bells). "This school is not smothered in policies, regulations and rules," one teacher observed. Much is left to the discretion of teachers; some things are understood and not formalized.

School N's objectives in the General-level program according to the principal are: (1) to have students learn at the level suited to their ability; (2) prepare students for entrance to community college or the world of work. In the last few years, workshops for teachers of General-level courses have been held and there is a growing recognition that new evaluation procedures need to be adopted for General level. Four goals are set each year--this year a committee is examining the dropout phenomenon at the school. Extracurricular activities are used as a vehicle to encourage General-level involvement, fostering a feeling of "belonging" in the school and, ideally, helping to hold students.

Although originally the rationale for SWIS in School T was to lure students who had dropped out back to school, it has evolved into an approach to keep students at high risk in school in both Schools T and S. It is a highly individualized approach that does not involve large groups of students. Students who are failing two or more courses at mid-term become potential candidates for the program. Students are able to select courses that they want to take and in which they feel they will be successful, taught by teachers with whom they have a good relationship. They take up to two courses. For the other half of the day, they work at a paying job for which they receive credit. This flexible approach is designed to give the student "breathing room" at a critical time. Students feel they are encouraged to make their own choices.

In School O, the philosophy of specialization centres around preparing senior students at each level of difficulty for specific post-secondary plans. Grades 9 and 10 courses are offered at all levels of difficulty in the school. In Grade 11, students from across the board choose certain goals, that is, university, college, or job, and are bussed to the designated school offering the appropriate courses and level of difficulty, increasing, it is hoped, the relevance of school to their future plans. The General-level program specialization goals at School O are to prepare students for college programs or for employment in the fields of business and technology. This Board initiative reflects a policy of efficiently utilizing limited fiscal resources and providing a diversity of student programs to meet student needs throughout the area. Specialization was a political solution to declining enrolments and possible school closures.

The philosophy of non-streaming for the first six weeks of Grade 9 core courses in School Q evolved because of a real concern about the increasing numbers of students who shift from

Advanced- to General-level courses later and a need to identify the problem students early. The philosophy of "Project G," as the special approach to General level is called, and the special activities of the committee have had the effect of improving the attitude of many teachers towards teaching General-level courses, identifying potential dropouts and making the school an attractive place for students. This year the General-level committee designed a set of activities for the teachers in the Grade 9 core courses to use in the first six weeks of their classes of non-specified levels of difficulty. These activities include diagnostic tests of basic skills.

What all these program approaches have in common are the goals of helping the students taking mainly General-level courses accumulate enough credits to graduate, making their school experience a meaningful one by clarifying their goals and leading them to appropriate post-secondary areas in which they will be successful.

F. SEQUENCING/PACKAGING

"The term 'school-related packages' identifies a particular set of courses planned by the school to provide a curricular emphasis for students who may have a specific educational goal in mind.... The success of the school-related package in meeting particular student goals depends strongly on the joint planning of the courses by all teachers who participate in the package" (OSIS, p. 23). School-related packages would ideally serve to increase the relevance of school to post-secondary aspirations, especially important to students taking mainly General-level courses.

Although General-level students may not have a clear idea of what kind of job they will seek after secondary school, it is important that they are aware of where the sequences or packages of courses that schools may offer lead. They receive this information in two ways: through their school calendar and through course and career counselling, by teachers and guidance counsellors.

In the eight General-level programs examined, the calendars presented a range of course descriptions. The range was greater, of course, in larger schools. Some calendars made no mention at all of how courses may relate to one another and may be combined in a package and others give extremely detailed packaging information that closely follows the OSIS recommendations. Although calendars typically show individual subjects within departments grade by grade (in a flow chart form), few make an effort to link them to other courses outside subject areas.

Following the establishment of its General-level committee, this is the first year School M is offering packages and they are quite comprehensive. Each package and its career goals are clearly presented on a full page of the calendar, accompanied by a student planning diagram for four years. "All students taking their program at the General-level of difficulty are strongly recommended to enroll in one of the three school-related package programs." When students select a package, they are "expected to fulfill all the requirements of that package" in order to receive an endorsement in a certain subject area on their graduation diploma.

Three packaged areas are included: business, technological studies, and services. Within the business studies area there are two separate packages outlined, one a general business package, the other clerical/secretarial. Both packages can lead to a college program in business education or directly into the work force. The technological studies area has three separate packages: automotive technology, wood technology, and mechanical technology. Year 1 is an exploratory year for all in either auto/mechanics/machine or woodwork/drafting/electricity. Both exploratory shop sections are offered in all girls' sections. Years 2 to 4 require courses related specifically to the package along with core and optional courses. There is one services package described consisting of arts, business and social science courses as options and leading to either people-oriented service areas (e.g., food/travel/hotel industry, child care) or community college.

All packages in School M have related co-operative education available in Grade 12 where students will earn 4 in-school credits and a minimum of 3 credits in the workplace. (Work experience or job shadowing is recommended for Grades 11 and 12.)

In School N, course packages for some programs are offered as "guidelines" for students. They are presented in the calendar along with course descriptions. Three areas are represented: fine arts--three packages including music, drama, and visual art; business--four packages including accounting, data processing, secretarial, and entrepreneurial/marketing; and, technology--four packages in auto technology, mechanical technology, construction technology, and computer technology. All packages are offered at both the Advanced and General level, except computer technology, which is only offered at the Advanced level. There is no strong endorsement of packages or encouragement for students at either level to take them, although it was noted by one teacher that students taking mainly General-level courses were more likely to take packages than others. Students are not "locked in" at any time; approximately 20 percent of students take packages of courses.

A school which specializes in General-level packages at the senior level holds the possibility of offering an effective approach to dealing with course packaging problems, such as student resistance to taking packages, ability to offer a diversity of programs while efficiently utilizing limited fiscal resources, and avoiding duplication. The specialized program in School O is in its second year, and reflects the pressures of this new orientation. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of the technological studies and business packages offered in this school, but students and teachers are having serious problems adjusting to several key implementation aspects. In Grades 9 and 10, students at all three levels take a variety of courses. In Grades 11, 12, and I3/OAC, the students are separated by level and choice of program into different schools. This results in bussing, separation from friends, and schools somewhat "stigmatized" by the level of difficulty of their courses.

The advantage of specialization is that it allows a school to concentrate its senior courses at one level of difficulty, offering packages at that level as well as a variety of appropriate support courses. For the specialized packages in Grades 11 and 12 in technological studies and business, information sheets are provided for students showing what courses may make up a package. The three packages in the business area are secretarial, accounting and retailing/marketing. In the technological area, six packages are offered: machine, auto, construction, electrical, welding, and electronic technologies. All packages have a co-operative education component.

Schools S and T offer the alternative program called SWIS (School Within a School) with a specially designed program for borderline dropouts as the key component. For a period of time (not longer than a year), students select only those courses that they want to take (half day) and in which they feel they will be successful. To further individualize the program, a job for half the day for which the student receives both credits and pay is included (a type of "paid co-op"). All other elements, that is, attendance, discipline, and evaluation, are the same as for all other students in the school. There are no program packages involved.

School Q offers packaged courses in Grades 11 and 12 in commerce (office practice and entrepreneurship), technological studies (auto mechanics) and applied arts (visual arts--architecture and design and dramatic arts). Grade 12 courses in drama and theatre production are slated to be offered in September, 1988.

Schools P, R, S, and T offer no distinct packaging of courses.

G. CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION

Co-operative education (or "co-op" as it is generally called) allows students to earn credits out of school in a job related to a complementary in-school course. Students at all levels of difficulty can participate in co-operative education. In semestered schools, students typically spend one semester taking courses for half the day and work at their job the other half. The Ministry of Education has determined the credit ratio between the in-school and out-of-school components to be as follows: the in-school component must form at least one-third of the program. The two components ideally will "reinforce each other and both be completed within the total allotted course time" (OSIS, p. 26).

Co-operative education is increasingly becoming an important program element for students taking mainly General-level courses. It was present in varying degrees in six of the programs we studied and in a slightly different form in the other two (SWIS). In those schools that were just beginning a co-operative education program, there are plans to expand next year. The following statement highlights its importance in General-level programming. "Most students taking mainly General-level courses will not qualify for a diploma in four years under OSIS; many are opting for four years in school and a co-op year." (Head of Guidance)

Co-operative education is a natural complement to General-level packages. It is available in all packages offered in Schools M, N, and O which include technological studies, business, services, and fine arts packages. School R offers co-op in business, technological studies, and family studies. School P has the most extensive range of courses in which students can take co-op: in all of the above plus music, English, geography, computer mathematics, physical education, science, and community services. There are approximately 300 employers involved in this program. Although Schools P and R are the same size (1,450), School P has 133 senior students in co-op and School R, only 29. School O (the specialization school, size 640) has 115 co-operative education students in Grades 11 and 12 in the business and technological studies areas. The goal of its guidance department is to try to involve as many students as possible, especially those enrolled in Grade 12. School Q, another smaller school (size 750), has only 35 students taking co-operative education mostly in business courses.

Schools have criteria for students to meet before they are eligible for co-operative education. Age, grade, and credit accumulation are the most common criteria. Some co-op programs involve only Grade 12 students, others include Grade 11s. In School N where co-operative education is offered in Grade 12, students are required to have 22 credits. In Schools P and Q students must have 16 and 15 credits, respectively and be at least 16 years of age. School Q specifies a good attendance record, recommendations of the teacher, and some employment skills as criteria as well. Students in School R must be "on track" regarding credit accumulation in Grades 11 and 12.

Schools M, P, and Q are in boards that co-ordinate many aspects of the co-op program (e.g., printing, identifying employers). In some areas, more than one board is involved. Co-operative education programs that are strongly supported by the central co-ordination of the local board(s) display distinct advantages. Students have more choice of placements; co-ordinated advertising has more of an impact, appealing to potential employers as well as students.

Schools are dependent on the availability of jobs in the community to run a co-operative education program. This can impose a serious constraint on the program. School N, for example, has many more students interested than available placements; this year it could only place 20 students. On the other hand, School P has more placements than students, which, it is felt, encourages a healthy "competition" among employers. Work-experience programs (offering no credit but involving shorter periods of exploring career alternatives) are offered in Grades 11 and 12. School P uses job shadowing in conjunction with co-op where students, who are trying to decide between two types of careers, spend two days observing people at work.

For co-operative education to be meaningful, the students must receive feedback from employers and teachers. Evaluation and monitoring on the job are present in all programs. Self-evaluation also plays an important role in these co-operative education programs.

At least one individual should be responsible for the program in a school. In the programs examined, co-operative education is co-ordinated differently in individual schools. In School R where co-op is not high profile, it is co-ordinated by the business department. Schools M and P, where there are large numbers of co-op students, have full-time co-op teachers. School O's program is co-ordinated by one guidance counsellor, and Schools N and Q have a teacher in charge of co-operative education and "world of work"--a guidance co-operative education course designed for career exploration and planning (1 credit) combined with a co-op placement (2 credits).

Effective delivery of co-operative education programs depends on several things. First, the willingness (and availability) of local employers is, of course, a key element. Second, the co-ordinator of the co-operative education program should have the time to search out and examine appropriate placements for students and ensure that there is a clear understanding on the employers' part of what is involved. The largest programs have a full-time co-operative education co-ordinator, although it is not clear if other programs would grow significantly with a teacher assigned full-time to co-operative education. Third, the work component should be integrated into a student's timetable so that class time is not affected.

A choice of clearly outlined packages recommended for students taking mainly General-level courses combined with a strong co-operative education component can be a highly effective way of giving the school experience relevancy for this group of students.

H. COUNSELLING

In our most recent studies (King, 1986; King, Warren, and Peart, 1988) we found guidance counselling to be an important component of a good school, but one that received strong criticism from students who take their courses at the General level. We attempted to find out if guidance departments had in place procedures that responded to the concerns of relevancy and access that were raised by students. Guidance counsellors, teachers, and students were interviewed regarding guidance services in the eight schools. The following issues were explored: In what ways are students encouraged to take packages if they were offered? Are students taking mainly General-level courses counselled differently (e.g., at more critical times)? Are changes in attendance or evaluation policies having an effect on the guidance services available? What kinds of things are done to help students adjust when they enter Grade 9? Have new approaches increased counsellors' workload? What role do guidance counsellors play when a student is thinking of leaving school early?

Guidance departments vary in organization and students are assigned to counsellors in various ways, but one feature is typical--the once a year counselling session. The guidance department in the eight schools studied all attempted to accomplish this. Few guidance activities seem to have been tailored specifically to the needs of students taking mainly General-level courses. Strategies for seeing students, reviewing option sheets, and counselling for course changes (due either to failure or another preference of course) varied only slightly from school to school.

In School P emphasis is given to career counselling in the classroom. A one-week career education program for all levels is held in Grade 9 science, Grade 10 mathematics, and Grades 11 and 12 English classes. Teachers are encouraged to assume some responsibility for course counselling and to include a meaningful career component in their teaching. A school-wide change in the home form system in School P has been effected with teachers assuming increased responsibility for attendance and parental contact, progress reports, credit summarization, and the checking of prerequisites. Grade 9 home form teachers are carefully selected, and Grades 9 and 10 slotted into homogeneous home forms by grade (as opposed to being mixed in with senior grades.) Ideally, the student will have the same home form teacher throughout his or her years at school. The aim of this approach is to encourage a "counselling relationship" between the students and teachers, in an extended home form period, and give one teacher the opportunity to understand the total school experience of each student. The benefit to individual students could be immense, although it was noted that the system "works as well as the teacher involved". Although the system is school-wide, the students who could benefit most are those taking mainly General-level courses.

Peer counselling has been introduced in School N where senior students help other students use computer-assisted guidance programs (i.e., SGIS, CHOICES), thus freeing some counsellors for other tasks. Students are assigned the same counsellor for four years. Counsellors try to make it difficult for students to drop out and say they will "bend the rules for the student's sake". School N has also combined the jobs of Resource Teacher (Special Education) and Behavioural Counsellor. The incumbent handles behavioural problems before they get to the vice-principal's office. His role as a counsellor is a non-judgemental one; the position has strong support from teachers and the vice-principal. There is a good relationship between the guidance department and the co-operative education program. Guidance counsellors strongly encourage students taking mainly General-level courses to consider co-operative education.

Specialization has had a negative impact on the degree to which counsellors and students get to know each other in School O because of student transfers in and out of the school in Grade 11. One counsellor feels that packages do not seem to work because students take options outside of packages or need to repeat courses. He encourages students to take co-operative education in technological studies or business. Students who want to go to college are given college calendars to take home and instructed how to interpret them. Follow-up interviews are held. For students who will go directly to a job, the opportunities of co-op are emphasized. A counsellor is in charge of the co-op program.

No special counselling procedures were evident in School R, part of the Teaching to Pass philosophy. The guidance department is not directly involved in the co-op program.

In School T, each counsellor gets a printout of his or her students' marks at mid-term. If a student has failed two or more subjects, he or she is "tracked". These students may be referred to the

SWIS program. Counsellors, however, are confused by the lack of specific requirements by which students are admitted to the SWIS program. Originally asked to be involved in monitoring these students, marking individual lessons and communicating with teachers, counsellors are reluctant to commit themselves to a program which has few resources and is very time consuming. The students are high-risk students who counsellors feel would need one visit per week. Counsellors see the potential of SWIS but feel the quality of counselling to the 300 other students for whom they are responsible would suffer. The feeling is that they can best counsel students who want help, the ones who come to them.

In the other SWIS program, located in School S, a much smaller school, the vice-principal also acts as head of guidance. A pattern of absences is the key way in which potential dropouts are identified. Teachers are consulted on whether certain students should or should not go into SWIS; about half the students who apply eventually choose to enter the program. One counsellor feels that the capability of the SWIS program to retain students may be beyond the school's resources unless the student has been there for several years. Individual and personal counselling is useful and appealing to these students and flexible counselling sessions are offered to SWIS students.

In School Q, the guidance counsellors show a commitment to helping students who lack motivation and a sense of direction. The counsellors emphasize their role in assisting them to select a suitable career, but they do not appear to have any direct involvement in the identification of co-operative education placements or liaison with the co-op co-ordinator. Much of the guidance department's work in counselling students and communicating with teachers about problem students and potential dropouts is carried out by teachers themselves, especially by those involved with the General-level committee.

The support of all guidance departments for co-operative education is unanimous. As one guidance head said: "Co-operative education is the only way we retain the students in Grades 11 and 12 for whom school is a struggle." Many guidance counsellors view co-operative education as a highly effective program component for students at risk of dropping out. The involvement of guidance departments ranges from total responsibility in one school for co-ordinating co-operative education to peripheral involvement (e.g., suggesting the program to students) in most of the schools. In the schools visited, guidance departments offer courses in career exploration with such titles as Guidance Co-operative Education, Career Exploration, Community Service, and World of Work. In the six schools that offer such courses, one is a non-credit course. Except in one school, these are in addition to the co-op offered through particular subject areas.

An alliance between student services and all co-operative education programming could serve as a strong base for a comprehensive guidance program. By using the guidance department for co-ordinated career planning and exploration through work experience in addition to the guidance credit courses and a meaningful co-op experience, students should begin to see more value in the guidance department. It also would provide counsellors with a much better understanding of job opportunities for those not planning on post-secondary education.

I. ATTENDANCE

"Students who habitually miss class will suffer in the evaluation process because their participation and achievement cannot be fully assessed" (OSIS, p. 35).

Secondary schools have, over the years, developed fairly standard policies regarding discipline, attendance, and behaviour. More attention was brought to each of these areas when the Ministry of Education required schools to establish written "Codes of Conduct and Behaviour" (OSIS, p. 35). With the introduction through OSIS of 30 required credits, the importance of attendance has increased. Every credit is significant for students taking mainly General-level courses and to fall behind may lead to discouragement and, potentially, dropping out.

Schools are looking for more effective attendance policies and procedures in an attempt to deal with the problem of absent students. Some schools have developed specific attendance policies that clearly state the consequences for the number of classes missed. The most popular of these attendance policies was introduced by School R and is called simply "5, 10, 15." Although it is a school-wide policy not aimed only at the General level, it is of some consequence in the Teaching to Pass philosophy. Other schools in this study (M, S) and elsewhere are trying variations of it. The policy is implemented through an elaborate morning ritual in School R involving several school personnel (2 vice-principals, 3 secretaries). The procedures require parental involvement. Upon the fifth absence from any class, the teacher sends a progress report home to the parents and a copy to the attendance office. Upon the tenth absence from any class and after the teacher completes the appropriate form and sends it to the attendance office, a meeting with parents is scheduled. Upon the fifteenth absence, the student is placed in a study hall and removed from the course with a loss of the credit. (There is the possibility of a special extension to 20 absences being granted in some cases and a student would be required to write the final exam.)

One objective of a "get tough" attendance policy is to emphasize to students that the importance of being there and being on time is not confined to their school experience. Attendance and punctuality are essential to keeping a job, and, in some cases, getting a job. (One employer interviewed regularly asks for the student's attendance record when hiring, not the marks.) In the alternative program, which incorporates paid part-time work for credit, regular attendance is an obvious requirement.

Reinforcing the habit of regular attendance and being on time is a responsibility of a school. Whether or not attendance should be an integral part of evaluation is another question. School R's calendar and student handbook state: "Regular attendance on the part of the student is vital to the process of learning and attendance along with class participation is part of the evaluation process." In the Teaching to Pass evaluation model, attendance is given the same weighting (i.e., one-fifth) as social skills and work ethic. (One student who attended another school last year and had 180 class absences said he has only had one so far this year.)

In School S, after 10 absences from a given class, a student will not receive a credit and other alternatives such as SWIS are considered.

It is difficult to characterize attendance policies as "program specific," even though they may have originated as part of a new approach, because they tend to cut across all programs and levels and become school-wide policies.

J. SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE/CLIMATE

1. Extracurricular Activities

We know from our previous research that student and teacher satisfaction with the extracurricular program is a major component of an effective school (King, Warren, Peart, 1988). Although it was not the intention of this study to conduct an in-depth analysis of the extracurricular programming in the eight schools, the relevance of the extracurricular program became readily apparent in the analysis of student satisfaction. The importance of the extracurricular program in fostering positive student-teacher relationships is recognized in all the schools. Administrators are faced each year with matching student interests with staff supervisors, often a difficult task, especially identifying activities which may be attractive to students who take mainly General-level courses.

Since extracurricular activities do foster school spirit and a sense of "belonging", it is possible that they have a role to play in retaining students. Two schools where teachers and administrators

showed a great deal of pride in their extracurricular program were School R and School N. School N, in particular, emphasizes involvement by both students and teachers. There is an extracurricular committee of six staff and six students that puts ideas into action. Any suggestion receiving at least some support is tried.

Constraints to extracurricular programming are intensified by General-level specialization in School O. Advanced-level students provide a great deal of leadership and motivation in activities and when they transfer out in the senior grades, the extracurricular program is weakened and restructuring is necessary to meet the needs of students taking mainly General-level courses. This is not an easy task and one which will involve leadership development over several years. A committee has been set up at School O to try to rebuild the program.

Another constraint to extracurricular participation by students is their involvement in part-time jobs. This was mentioned frequently in interviews with teachers. As noted elsewhere is this study, nearly two-thirds of senior high school students have regular part-time jobs. This fact combined with the concentrated workload in semestered schools has affected many extracurricular activities. Attendance at after-school practices, evening rehearsals and other events is made more difficult.

2. Impact of Program on School

In most of the school-wide programs, the innovative program for students taking mainly General-level courses appears to have had a positive impact on the overall school atmosphere and student/teacher/administrator rapport. Schools M, N, and Q have a more positive atmosphere and increased teacher satisfaction through the General-level committee work, workshops, and other special activities. It is probably too early to assess the impact that the introduction of course packages is having on students and staff. In School P, where teachers in two departments have volunteered to try Teaching to Pass, there is an increased awareness of the needs of students who take their courses mainly at the General level. Students are aware, as well, that they are receiving extra attention. For some teachers in School R, Teaching to Pass has inspired a new commitment to teaching General-level courses. They point to a lowered failure rate, a decrease in the dropout rate, and improved attendance.

The impact of specialization in School O has been negative for both teachers and students. Teachers view it as a solution to a political problem, imposed without consultation. Students do not feel it is a special program for them and cannot see the advantages that may be present in the program and packages. Few students to date are actually taking packages.

In the SWIS program, the impact on a few students has been dramatic. However, because of the small number of students involved, there is little overall influence on Schools S and T as a result of the SWIS program. Teachers and other students are usually unaware of who the SWIS students are. It is the administrators who are highly involved in implementing SWIS in each school.

K. TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

In most of these exemplary programs, the recognition that failure rates were too high and dropping out was a risk in General-level courses inspired administrators and teachers to find a new approach to student evaluation, teaching methodology, and, in a few cases, program. One measure of the success of these new directions is the degree of satisfaction and commitment felt by teachers and students.

1. School M

Teachers in School M have a high degree of enthusiasm for their school. This probably reflects the fact that many were specially selected to teach General-level courses and have a genuine interest in teaching these students. They are particularly appreciative of the fact that the school is not overregulated. The principal allows his teachers a high degree of autonomy: he sets a positive tone and direction to create the climate to hold students until they gain maturity. The teachers describe their teaching as "relevant", more in line with vocational goals, and skill-oriented. Teachers expressed satisfaction with the school-wide approach to evaluation, which allows for departmental flexibility. Some are giving students a second chance to rewrite tests and resubmit assignments; some are dividing subject matter into smaller multiple units and testing frequently.

There is little recognition by teachers that their courses fit into a program or combination of courses which comprise a package. Only a few students said they were taking packages although students were aware that they were offered. One Grade 11 girl said most of her courses were in business, but she was not taking a "package". Co-operative education was viewed positively by several student groups who mentioned it.

There was a wide range of responses from the students in School M, although for the most part they were positive. The students were quite aware of how teachers assigned marks, what behaviour would lead to a poor mark, and most felt teachers were fair in their marking. All agreed they could get individual help in their courses. The majority of students agreed that teachers were friendly, were "truly concerned", and tried to treat them as individuals by talking to them outside of class and offering help when required. Some of the typical positive comments were:

> It has the best school spirit I have ever seen.
>
> It is better than my old school.
>
> It is organized--you always know what is coming next.
>
> It has lots of sports.
>
> Everyone gets along.
>
> The school works as a team.

2. School N

In School N, the principal provides the main driving force in establishing a good atmosphere and meeting the needs of students taking mainly General-level courses. General-level workshops and other professional development strategies have been used to develop teaching styles, sensitivity, and evaluation strategies appropriate to these students. There is a high turnover in staff (of four to five a year) in this small isolated northern town and as a result current staff is relatively young. Despite the concern by a few department heads that some "academics" have difficulty understanding students who take mainly General-level courses and do not want to teach the General-level courses they are assigned, there is high satisfaction. Of the nine subject teachers interviewed, however, only one indicated less satisfaction teaching General-level courses than Advanced. The others talked about the students in their General-level courses as honest, receptive, easier to have fun with, and "a good group of kids". The predominant teaching style in General-level courses is more "doing" than observing, more practical, hands-on methods with more frequent evaluation, and more behavioural focus. All the teachers displayed sensitivity to this group of students. Co-operative education is viewed as an important alternative by all these teachers.

The majority of the students interviewed in School N felt they could always get help in a course if they needed it; they were quite aware of what criteria teachers used to evaluate them and most felt that their marks were fair. Interestingly, the students did not consider the principal as a highly visible figure in the school even though he established the student-centred tone. There was a general consensus among the students that they would stay until they graduated, although for many it would take more than four years. Their views of the level of difficulty of their courses varied:

> General is better than Basic [level].
>
> General level does not mean you are dumber, some who can do Advanced take General because it is more relaxed.

> I feel O.K. about taking General level--there is no stigma.

One group of Grade 10 students agreed their General-level courses were slow paced sometimes, but have more connection with day-to-day life than Advanced-level courses. Overall, the feeling among the students is one of satisfaction with most aspects of their school.

Although packages are offered as guidelines in the course calendar few students (20%) in School N take them. Goals are vague for most, and although they like the idea of courses that tie into jobs, many do not say they make course choices based on their future job aspirations: they choose compulsory courses and ones that interest them. At least one student in each group interviewed mentioned co-op as something he or she was taking or considering for the future.

3. School O

Teachers in School O, where program specialization in Grades 11 and 12 for General-level technological and business studies was in its second year, were divided in their support for the program. From the principal's perspective there are three main reasons why some teachers are having trouble adapting to the program: (1) with the senior Advanced-level courses gone the more positive role models for students are not present; (2) teachers are frustrated in trying to meet teacher goals in General-level programs; and, (3) some were unwillingly transferred into the school.

The teachers tended to agree with these negative aspects. Several teachers were quite enthusiastic about teaching students in the General-level program, but were uncommitted regarding specialization. Teachers were either extremely negative about specialization or were taking a "wait and see" attitude. A vice-principal noted that teachers were becoming more accepting and a majority believed in what the school was doing.

It may be too soon for teachers to be able to accurately assess the specialization program. They see specialization as a political solution to keeping all the schools in the board open and as having been imposed without discussion and consensus. Some feel the school is developing a reputation of being a "dumping ground" for problem students. Many feel the bussing of large numbers of students in Grades 11 and 12 is disruptive, and is resulting in an increase of students with personal problems. One teacher says, "The toughest part for the teacher is the mental shift from teaching Advanced- to General-level courses: they require a lot more preparation."

Although one teacher feels there is no sense of community in the school (because of the transfer in and out for Grade 11), another teacher finds the mix of students from across the city a big advantage. She notes as well the good equipment and textbooks in business and tech. One guidance counsellor said:

> Packages have been tried but do not seem to work: students take [their own] choices or options outside of packages or need to repeat courses.

It is an interesting and ironic concept that the low use of packaging may be due to student course failures in junior grades. The need to make up failed courses and the risk of further failure can act as a disincentive for taking packages. Most of the teachers lamented the demise of the extracurricular program; a committee of teachers and students has been set up to rebuild the program.

For many of the students in School O specialization has not changed their program or courses at all. One Grade 12 student said, "It's just like my old school." The students feel negatively about being bussed. The school is considered to be no longer popular because it is thought to be a General-level school and there is a stigma attached: "I don't want people to think I have come from a low-grade school." Several Grade 12 students talked about a lack of freedom or flexibility in course selections and limited options.

Most students were satisfied with their teachers, felt they were able to get extra help when required and were marked fairly. There was also a good understanding of the criteria used for evaluation. Nevertheless, the overwhelming feeling among students in the specialized school is one of dissatisfaction.

Another Grade 12 boy is quoted as saying, "You would think they would be teaching you more because of the specialized courses, but it is too general and basic."

Students indicated that career counselling through the guidance department was limited and they were often referred to the school board's career counselling centre.

4. School P

The guidance department ("current and knowledgeable") in School P has a good reputation with both teachers and students. The co-operative education program has a high profile in the school and is also viewed very positively by both groups. Teachers agree they have different expectations for students at different levels of difficulty. A new home form system gives teachers increased areas of responsibility for their home form students: teachers view the change positively. It is a chance to get to know some students more individually.

One thing many teachers commented on was the prevalence of regular part-time work by students. The principal said it had affected extracurricular activities as well as fostered "academic lethargy" and lack of academic commitment.

Students' positive attitude toward the guidance department is remarkably consistent. As one student said, "Some of them are pretty good and others are good, and some are really excellent." Not all students say they would go for personal counselling, but the support for career counselling is substantial. Most students seem very aware of the importance of finishing high school in order to get a good job, although sometimes they perceived low relevance of courses to job aspirations. Co-operative education appealed to many of the students as early as Grades 9 and 10. Most seemed satisfied with the level of their courses:

> General level is the level I am able to pass.
> General level is easier.
> I am in General-level [courses] because my marks are not high.

5. School Q

In School Q students take a common curriculum in the core courses for the first six weeks in Grade 9 until their abilities have been carefully assessed by all of their teachers, in conjunction with elementary teacher recommendations and contact with parents. Then they begin courses at the appropriate difficulty levels. The philosophy behind this special program is early diagnostic assessment in order to (1) more accurately assign students to a difficulty level suitable to their needs, (2) identify students with deficits in reading and mathematics to be given special individual attention, and (3) actively deal with students with motivational problems early in their secondary school careers. The driving force behind this program is a very strong General-level committee with an enthusiastic leader who have been given the full support of school and board administrators, which includes time away from teaching responsibilities. Other positive, complementary elements in the school program include the presence of a highly respected social worker and psychologist, special library activities to inspire poor readers, an active Learning Resource Unit that deals not only with special education students, but those with behavioural and motivational problems on a temporary withdrawal-from-class basis; noon-hour extracurricular activities with high student involvement; and frequent visits from business and industry representatives. The constructive, enthusiastic attitude of teachers inspires a constant collaborative re-evaluation of what is best for the students. The teachers have a keen sensitivity about the "General-level student". There are some concerns that are being assessed by the program team: the feeling that the high achieving Advanced-level students are being held back; time-consuming logistical problems; and, inadequacy of standardized diagnostic tests. The high energy level of the teachers involved in the General-level committee and the active support of the principal and his teachers appear to have served to generate enthusiasm for the school among students and staff. In the interview sessions with groups of five to six students, many taking courses mainly at the General level, most students expressed openly that the school for them was a "super place to be" with teachers "who really cared" and were "like friends".

6. School R

School R, an urban school of over 1,400, implemented the Teaching to Pass philosophy three years ago. Even though the approach is aimed at students who take mainly General-level courses, it tends to cut across the curriculum at all levels. As explained in Chapter IV, the key focus is the evaluation policy, which emphasizes the demonstration of work-related responsibilities (i.e., work ethic, social skills, and attendance). In the model, these comprise 60 percent of a student's mark; knowledge of academic content equals 40 percent. The teachers at School R are somewhat divided on several aspects of the approach. The de-emphasis of the academic part of evaluation, as well as re-testing, has evoked some unfavourable reaction. Some teachers foresee difficulties at the post-secondary level because the students are not being prepared well: "At college and universities, you cannot rewrite tests until you pass." Others feel they have been very sensitive to this group of students over the years and have been teaching to pass all along, being especially flexible in the evaluation of General-level courses, and that Teaching to Pass has merely formalized evaluation procedures teachers already use. It legitimizes many teachers' de-emphasis of evaluation of substantive learning and their increased emphasis on attitude and effort for students of lesser abilities. "If you are a good teacher who cares about kids and is able to convey that message so that they know you care, then you do not need to follow Teaching to Pass--all it is is a good sound teaching philosophy."

On the other hand, there is a group of teachers who found the new approach was just what they needed to infuse their teaching with a fresh enthusiasm. It helped to eliminate the negativity that had gradually built up in their approach to General-level courses. Even though the teachers interviewed had mixed reactions to Teaching to Pass, all of them were very committed to the students and highly enthusiastic about the school.

"A positive outlook is the whole point of teaching to pass. I stress to students the idea of success in all things, not just academics." The actual evaluation procedures are left up to individual departments and teachers; for example, some teachers, but not all, use the rewrite option in testing.

School R has good school spirit and an extensive extracurricular program. The students have a great deal of pride in their school and its standing in the community. Few students identified Teaching to Pass as a distinct philosophy, methodology or approach. However, they were quite aware of the importance of attending class and the consequence of any absence to their marks, both important components. As well, they were usually clear regarding the breakdown of marks (i.e., 60/40). Several students remarked that teachers "want you to do well in school and they want you to pass". Evaluation was generally viewed as fair. The students feel good about their school and their relationships with teachers and administrators.

7. Schools S and T

Schools S and T offer an alternative program called School Within A School (SWIS) for students at high risk of dropping out. Students are allowed to enter the program at any time during the year, take two courses (half-day), and work at a paying job (half-day) for credit. Administrators in both schools are very involved in both identifying students for admission into the program and in counselling them while they are actually in the program. Although teachers feel the program has good potential, because of lack of staffing it is hard to further develop the positive effects. They hesitate to recommend students for SWIS due to lack of consistent staff support.

The guidance department in School T was originally asked to monitor the SWIS students and communicate with teachers, but half the department was not interested in becoming involved because of time constraints. These students need extra counselling sessions, and counsellors feel the quality of counselling for other students would drop. These high-risk students, one counsellor commented, "Need intensive care from a professional."

Individual teachers responsible for co-ordinating aspects of the program are not very "tuned in" to SWIS. One teacher commented that the students who enter SWIS are high-risk in many areas; he is more interested in working in co-operative education than SWIS. A teacher not directly involved in the administrative part of the program, but who has had SWIS students in his classes is positive;

he feels the program buys students time in a positive way by giving them a chance to earn some credits. In School T many teachers were not aware of exactly who in their classes was in SWIS. Most teachers were positive about the program. With extra resources, they felt it could live up to its potential.

School S teachers are also not always aware of which students are in SWIS. Teachers feel that it is good that students are not easily identified or segregated. The Independent Learning Centre is used in this school for tutoring students. One teacher feels the key to the program is its flexibility and the fact that SWIS helps students achieve a measure of independence at a critical time in their lives.

Students in the alternative program in Schools S and T were interviewed individually. The students had developed very poor attendance and achievement patterns; many had home problems and low self-esteem. School was not their first priority. If students initially perceived SWIS as an easy way to get credits, no one said it was easy in retrospect. Generally, students enjoyed the flexibility of the program, the paid work, the credits and the reduced pressure. One Grade 11 boy had been in SWIS since Grade 9 and said it "saved" him. All the students had favourable things to say about the program and the individual attention they were getting. The one complaint was the "lack of support" from the school for problems at work. The program has kept students from leaving school, from dropping subjects, and from having "a bad attitude". Some students have recommended it to their friends because it helped them. One principal commented, "Kids, after being in the program, present themselves differently and I even find I perceive them differently."

There are advantages to SWIS. Students are encouraged to remain in school by taking only the courses they select and by receiving credit for a paying job. There is special attention paid to them by the vice-principal or principal and the program co-ordinator (teachers are generally unaware of which students are in this individualized program). It only lasts a semester (or year) but helps to get students "over the hump" of wanting to quit school and 4 credits (or 8) can be obtained. The strengths of the program are: students do not have to break off their social contacts in school; there are good employers in the community who are clear and firm on guidelines; there is an identifiable person (Alternate Program Representative) who is the advocate for students in the program, and who is not a teacher. The disadvantages are: it may take students longer to gain required credits, especially if they forego taking core courses for a year; courses may be, but are not necessarily, related to the job; and, it could "spoil" them for non-paid co-operative education.

This alternate program is only practical in small numbers at the present time because of a lack of resources, and is only used as a last resort for high-risk students. "OSIS will make a success out of SWIS," said one principal, because 30 credits are too difficult to obtain. "OSIS doesn't recognize the needs of General-level students. I'm sometimes surprised kids keep coming to school."

L. SUMMARY

In the following discussion we consider the strengths and weaknesses of the exemplary programs studied. While the programs typically are well received by students and teachers, it must be remembered that many of the programs had been underway only one or two years at the time of our visits and this may explain why we found little evidence of a significant increase in retention in most of the programs.

The effort to provide greater opportunity for specialization using the magnet school concept appears to have been the least successful. The school in which the specialized Grades 11 and 12 programs were offered is located in a medium-sized city and is one of four schools involved in specialization. The advantage gained by providing more career-related programming for students taking General-level courses seems to be outweighed by the disadvantage of bussing, which takes time and separates students from friends. (Student socialization is an important function of secondary schools.) Also, the school takes on the character and status of the students it attracts--in this case, lower status because General- level courses have lower status. While there seems to be increasing evidence to support the magnet school concept for the arts, there is no equivalent level of support for specialized technical or business schools. Certainly, the support that exists for specialization is not based on the transfer of students into such schools after Grade 10.

Packaging of courses at the General level is not widespread in the province. This is related in part to the lack of flexibility schools have in offering packages and partly because students who take mainly General-level courses tend to be behind in credit accumulation at time of entry into Grade 11 when packages would normally begin. As a result, they are often unable to fully participate in a package. In fact, they are less inclined to do so if there are one or more courses in a package that may put them at risk of failure. Mathematics and science, for example, are typically components of technical packages and are perceived as difficult courses. In any case, we could find no evidence to support packaging as a device to keep more students in school to graduation, in spite of the effort to make school more relevant that the packaging concept assumes.

Co-operative education has grown dramatically in the last few years with the support of the Ministry of Education. It has provided many students and their teachers with the kind of success they had not experienced in the past. In Ontario, there is no natural liaison between schools and business and industry and so the identification of appropriate placements, the development of useful work skills and knowledge, and the supervision of the students in the work setting has been and will continue to be problematic. The efforts of teachers to make the program work is reinforced by the successes they have with their students in the program. The majority of students who are involved in co-operative education take the remainder of their courses primarily at the General level. The co-op credits do facilitate graduation (failure rates are low) but are not widely recognized as a prerequisite to enrolment at a college program. The increase in total credits required associated with OSIS has made a fifth year prior to graduation a strong possibility for many students who take their courses at the General level. Co-operative education in this fifth year serves the dual purpose of diploma completion and transition to the world of work.

The main reason that students drop out of secondary school is that they are failing. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that a number of educators are attempting to implement evaluation practices that allow for more student success. We examined one of these programs, Teaching to Pass, in some depth. Not surprisingly this program is targeted at the General level since this represents the largest group of students with motivational problems as well as being potential dropouts. While some questions are raised regarding the large amount of weight given to attendance, work ethic and social skills, the outcome tends to be more success, lower failure rates and reduced dropouts. It is argued that when the students are in class and are attentive they are bound to learn more. At this time we cannot say if the learning of academic content and skills has improved or is even at the same level. But there is no question that the students fail less.

Attendance patterns in the province vary substantially from school to school. With effort it is possible to improve the attendance pattern of students taking mainly General-level courses. One model designed to do this (5,10,15) was examined in this study as part of our review of Teaching to Pass. The procedure does take time and resources, but there appears to be a positive outcome. The students are more likely to attend school regularly and there is no indication of animosity directed toward the school by the students associated with the effort to improve attendance.

A number of schools in the province have made a special effort to make their school attractive to students. This typically involves offering a broad extracurricular program and ensuring positive student/teacher relationships in and out of class. In the one school studied that had attempted to employ such a student-centred approach, there is clear evidence of a very positive school atmosphere. In this school a positive atmosphere and a sense of pride on the part of students and teachers were evident. Ironically, students are remaining in school longer but failure rates have not changed substantially and as a result there is no sharp increase in the number of students graduating. Of course, it would be expected that the longer students are in school, the more likely they will graduate.

One school has made a specific effort to be responsive to the needs of students taking mainly General-level courses by implementing a program for early diagnosis of learning difficulties, improved student/teacher relationships and improved school atmosphere. The 9X program is relatively new and it is difficult to determine the long-term effects. However, the spin-off effects are quite positive especially with regards to engendering teacher sensitivity to the needs of Grade 9 students of lower academic ability and tending to learning disabilities early in the year. The criticisms tend to be related to the negative effects this six-week program could have on students heading for Advanced-level; that is, the lack of challenge put to them and the time taken away from "covering" the curriculum in a demanding course.

Students do get disenchanted with secondary school, often because they are falling behind in credits accumulated. When such students are left in regular classes, they often have a negative effect in terms of the motivation of other students. The SWIS program was designed to identify such students and provide them with individual programs. Many other alternatives in operation in the province at the present time have similar characteristics and goals. These programs typically take time and extra teaching responsibilities and are difficult to implement on a large scale. But on a small scale, there are many testimonials to their effectiveness in preventing school withdrawal.

CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

From a political point of view it may be useful to choose this point in time to identify school dropouts as a major issue, but from a very practical point of view the goal of substantially reducing the dropout rate from Ontario secondary schools may not be realistic. There are two reasons for this: first, school leaving is linked to academic success and with the introduction of OSIS and its increase in required courses for graduation without a corresponding increase in course success rates, more dropping out will likely occur. Secondly, since the early 1950s, there has been a pattern of increasing dropout rates paralleling the rise in numbers of job opportunities for youth and decreasing dropout rates when job opportunities diminish; therefore, the recent growth of the economy should also contribute to a higher dropout rate. Given these circumstances, how then can schools respond to the mandate of reducing dropout rates? In this chapter we attempt to pull the threads of the study together in order to identify those programmatic features that could contribute to an increase in secondary school graduation rates.

What is the optimum proportion of students who should remain in secondary school to graduation? Are there some social and economic costs when more or fewer students graduate? It may be that we can learn something from the American experience. Although there are substantial differences from state to state, American schools overall retain more students to graduation than is the case in Ontario. The in-school costs seem to be an increase in enrolment in general programs rather than in college preparatory or vocational programs, an increase in enrolment in non-academic courses such as personal services/personal development courses, a decrease in homework expectations, and a decline in scores on standardized tests. Is this a direction in which Ontario should move?

Students, and to a considerable extent their parents, see secondary education as a vehicle to improve career opportunities, less so as the provision of a good, general education. When career opportunities are limited by a lack of success in academic courses, and when students who are unsuccessful are "collected" together in General- and Basic-level courses disaffection grows and ultimately leads to many of these students leaving school. Students cannot be driven by programs that do not have clearly defined career opportunities. Although there may be social and economic advantages to the province in keeping young people in school (i.e., the control of young people during a period of their lives when they engage in high-risk behaviour, a reduction in the size of the labour pool where job opportunities are not widely available), there may be disadvantages that counterbalance them. For example, the disadvantages may include an increase in alienation among young people related to reduced opportunities for access to careers that require higher education and a depressing effect on the quality of learning for all students. The issue, then, is what is the optimum proportion of graduates, so that both the young people and society are best served. There comes a point when the effort to retain students is counter-productive to the quality of learning in schools. It is necessary to look merely at the situation of students in the province who take mainly General-level courses to illustrate this point. Over time, homework expectations have been reduced, exams are fewer, increased weight is being given to attitudinal indicators of achievement, and motivation is still depressed as evidenced by mark distributions and the growth of General-level workshops for teachers.

B. WHO DROPS OUT?

Students drop out because they are pregnant, their religion discourages them from pursuing higher education, they have behaviour problems, their courses are not relevant, or for other reasons; but, the overriding explanation for school leaving is simply a lack of academic success. The vast majority of students surveyed in this study left school because they were so far behind that the likelihood of graduation was too remote a possibility. How is it that we have such large numbers of students failing courses when the system is designed so that courses are offered at levels of difficulty appropriate to the ability of every student? There is little concern about dropout rates among students who take mainly Advanced-level courses, but a substantial number of these students do drop out. Why do these students who find school difficult not take their courses at a level of difficulty compatible with their abilities?

Students start secondary school with a fresh slate. They are not burdened by previous failures with regard to meeting the 30-credit requirement for graduation, except that previous failures act to predict subsequent failures. Some students fail because they attempt courses that are too difficult for them, but mainly because they are not sufficiently well motivated to meet course requirements. This pattern of early failure and later dropping out has not gone unnoticed by researchers in the United States and, to a lesser degree, in Canada. In response, we have the development of early identification procedures. There is a Grade 9 instrument that is being used in Ontario (**School and Me** or **L'école et moi, Quirouette, 1987**), but it is too early to determine its impact.

It is clear that the most direct way to reduce the dropout rate is to increase the success rate. This can be done by increasing the motivation of students by means of more relevant programming, improving student/teacher rapport, improving the quality of guidance services, and by reducing or changing expectations with respect to student evaluation. We touch on these approaches in our review of exemplary programs.

C. DOES PART-TIME WORK INFLUENCE SCHOOL LEAVING?

In the last few years, a large segment of the economy has been built around adolescent part-time workers. Much of this economy is also dependent on the purchasing power of the same adolescents (e.g., records, fast food). Their low-cost involvement in the economy keeps prices down. For example, what would a hamburger cost if those who make them were paid the same as those who build cars? Nearly two-thirds of senior students in secondary schools work part time and most of those remaining are seeking part-time jobs. The money gained is used primarily for personal spending. A major American study states that student part-time work has more disadvantages than advantages (Greenberger and Steinberg, 1986). Students experience premature affluence that contributes to spending patterns which are difficult to curtail when they begin their careers and discretionary money is not as available. They develop poor work habits because their jobs do not have career implications; that is, they have some control over when they work and how hard they work. Also, part-time work is a reason for not doing homework. The advantages of developing in young people characteristics such as reliability and responsibility and keeping down society's costs for certain products are not considered to outweigh the negative outcomes.

Part-time work does influence the quality of work done in schools and reduces opportunities for involvement in the social life of the schools. Nearly 40 percent of students who do work do so for more than 20 hours per week and this clearly has an adverse effect on school achievement. The Radwanski report has made an explicit recommendation regarding part-time work:

> It is therefore recommended that high schools take a pro-active role in making all students aware of the damage that excessive part-time work can do to their educational prospects, and that consideration be given to specifying in school codes of conduct the acceptable maximums of part-time work during the school year. (1988, p. 200)

It is our view that it would be useful to have a school policy that discourages student involvement in part-time work over 12 hours per week.

We found little evidence that part-time work contributes to students deciding to leave school. Over 40 percent of the dropouts surveyed were unemployed at the time of school leaving and one-third of the dropouts took up work in jobs which they had already been working at part time. Very few of the jobs that students left school to take were well paying enough to sustain them economically or provide career opportunities. On the other hand, taking up full-time work does legitimize school leaving and a small number of dropouts who had a reasonable chance of graduating chose to work after weighing the advantages of work over remaining in school. In fact, the vast majority of students who drop out do so because there is little advantage in remaining; only a small proportion of students actually leave school as a result of full-time job opportunities available to them.

D. STUDENT EVALUATION

1. Impact of OSIS on Student Evaluation and Student Progress

Since OSIS is only in its fourth year of implementation, it is difficult to establish its effect on the student retention pattern in Ontario secondary schools. An analysis of course success rates provided some indication of the likely effect. We found very little difference between pre-OSIS and OSIS success rates in academic courses; therefore, because of the requirement of more credits and more required courses there is likely to be an increase in overall provincial dropout rates.

A number of other factors will have positive or negative effects on students' completion of their secondary school diplomas. First, there is a lack of clarity of what the norm will be for completion of secondary school. If it becomes generally accepted that five years is required for the completion of an OSSD, then the large number of students who appear to be willing to remain in school, in spite of failing grades which earlier would have encouraged them to drop out, may continue to graduation. Second, encouragement to remain in school has been reinforced by media and political attention given to the issue of dropouts, thereby increasing the stigma. Also, there is the growth in job opportunities for young people that traditionally has had the effect of decreasing schools' retention rate even though we have found the jobs available to the school dropout are relatively low paying with little opportunity for career growth. Regardless of the factors influencing retention, our data on credit accumulation suggest a slight increase in dropout rates occurring as a result of the implementation of OSIS.

2. Trends in Student Evaluation

Evaluation of students taking General-level courses has long been problematic for Ontario secondary school teachers. While it is generally accepted that students in Basic-level courses must be evaluated using mainly behavioural and affective criteria, many teachers have attempted to evaluate students in General-level courses in similar ways to those in Advanced-level courses. This approach has not worked particularly well and over time there has been a notable reduction in course and homework expectations. We see two contradictory trends taking place. On the one hand, Teaching to Pass, with its emphasis on attendance, work ethic, and social skills, places less weight on students' knowledge of academic content and performance of skills. For many teachers, Teaching to Pass represents a legitimization of what they have been in the process of doing and, as a result, it has become widely accepted across the province. On the other hand, the Radwanski report is very specific in recommending product-oriented evaluation, controlled to a considerable extent by externally administered standardized tests. The research findings presented in this report provide little evidence of a decrease in dropouts occurring because of more relevant programming (i.e., career-related packages of courses). It is also quite clear that the Teaching to Pass approach can contribute to an increase in school retention. It is difficult to imagine an increase in school retention occurring for students at the General level as a result of increased emphasis on knowledge and skills accompanied by province-wide standardized tests unless, for reasons unclear to us, students are more likely to be motivated under these circumstances.

E. EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS AT THE BASIC LEVEL

While we did not find any school where there was a dramatic improvement in the retention of students taking their courses at the Basic level, we did find situations where there were substantial improvements over the provincial norms. We identified a number of principles that were important in the development of effective programming for students taking Basic-level courses.

1) Programming must recognize that these students have experienced little success at school and as a result have low self-esteem and tend to withdraw at the risk of failure. The pattern of school leaving at, on, or near the sixteenth birthday that is so common among these students is a clear rejection of the school experience.

2) Secondary school is likely to be the last experience for these students in the formal educational system. As such, the courses and programs offered must represent to

these students career possibilities that may not be as demanding, but which are comparable to those which post-secondary education offers to other secondary school students. Graduating with 30 credits must appear to Basic-level students a realistic goal. This means there must be developed a norm of graduation and role models of students who are successful, accompanied by course success rates that are congruent with this goal.

3) The extracurricular program of a school must encourage involvement of students in Basic-level courses by facilitating access and recognizing their interests.

4) The credit system provides students with individualized, personalized timetables and the appearance of flexibility. Students in Basic-level courses should have a similar degree of choice in course selection as other students. In spite of their viability for occupational preparation, highly structured packages with virtually no choice can create antagonism, and are not consistent with the individualized programming ideology that is fundamental to OSIS.

5) Very close monitoring of personal and social adjustment is required to sustain these students through stressful periods.

We suggest the following Basic-level course and program characteristics.

1. Basic-level Courses/Programs

In Grades 9 and 10, career exploration opportunities should be provided. Rapport should be established between students and teachers particularly regarding what school can offer. Grades 11 and 12 should be focussed specifically in terms of career preparation. There must be an element of choice present so that the students have a feeling that they are in control of their lives. While this is difficult to offer in composite schools, it is well worth the effort even if the choices must be limited.

The vast majority of students go directly to work from school. Therefore, well-designed co-operative education in a closely supervised setting provides an excellent transition. Naturally, the co-operative education must be linked to clear career interests. An alternative to the offering of co-op in Grades 11 and 12 is a Grade 11 shorter-term, work-experience component, as part of a special course or courses, followed by a more extensive co-operative education placement in Grade 12.

2. Student Evaluation Procedures

Since these students have developed a tradition of academic failure, there must be a rapid reversal of this pattern and confidence building should be a feature of teaching and evaluation in the early months of Grade 9. The expectation of success must be developed in small increments with considerable teacher encouragement. Failing these students so that they will work harder simply will not work. Failure rates must be low; success in all aspects of classroom work must be valued. The high success rates in Grade 9 must be projected by the students through to the completion of a graduation diploma. The Teaching to Pass philosophy is particularly relevant for these students. This does not mean that general educational goals need be totally disregarded, but that they be balanced with career/life skills-oriented curriculum.

3. Counselling

Since these students are at risk of leaving school long before graduation, their school program must be clearly monitored and support provided when necessary. This responsibility must necessarily be shared by guidance counsellors with those teachers who teach most of their courses at the Basic level. In composite schools in particular, it is necessary for guidance counsellors to be much more knowledgeable about career opportunities for students who take their courses at the Basic level than appears to be the case at present. Ideally, the guidance function should be integrated with a full range of student services including special education and co-operative education. It is fundamental that these students feel comfortable with those teachers and guidance counsellors involved in an integrated department of student services. It is here that the norm of graduation can be established and reinforced.

4. Extracurricular Programming

The students who take Basic-level courses are rarely involved in the extracurricular program in composite schools. They need more alternative forms of success than those provided in academic classes, but these activities must be directly related to their interests. Particular success has been found with clubs and activities related to fashion, rock music, and automobiles.

5. IPRC

We found substantial variation in the application of the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process. In some schools virtually all students who take their courses at the Basic level are reviewed, in others as few as 20 percent. We suggest some clarification and greater standardization in the use of IPRC be considered to ensure equality of opportunity.

F. EXEMPLARY PROGRAMMING AT THE GENERAL LEVEL

It was not possible to clearly identify all the separate elements in single schools that might be combined in various ways to produce programs that would serve to improve the retention rate for students taking courses at the General level. What follows then is an interpretation of what appears to work best.

It must be remembered that, unlike students at the Basic level, there is much more heterogeneity in the abilities, aptitudes, and course combinations of those students who take the majority of their courses at the General level of difficulty. As a result, the notion of sequences of courses that extend over three or four years and into post-secondary education cannot possibly be seen to serve all these students. There are students who start secondary school taking mainly Advanced-level courses and by Grade 12 they make up the greater proportion of students taking mainly General-level courses. Nearly half of the students who start their core courses at the General level drop out before completing diploma requirements. We also have a significant proportion of students who have a mixed timetable of General- and Advanced-level courses. Trying to establish a sense of direction for students in this morass has not been easy for Ontario educators.

I. Packages

Packages are combinations of courses targeted toward broad career goals. It is impossible for a typical composite school to offer a wide range of packages. If packages are offered they can only be offered in a few areas and, therefore, can inevitably only interest a small portion of the student population. In those schools where packages have been implemented, we found no evidence of an increase in interest, success in school, or retention rates because of them. Packages are relatively new and perhaps it will take longer to accurately assess their overall effectiveness. Student and teacher responses were not encouraging.

Packages appear most viable in business and secretarial sequences; in technological studies, the wide range of possibilities makes them less viable. One problem appears to be that the variability of packages from school to school does nothing to help business and industry understand what a graduate with an endorsement in a certain package has to offer. Employers rarely look for special courses or programs in a transcript when hiring. Packages are most meaningful when related to apprenticeship requirements.

Another problem with packages is that so many of the students who may be eligible to take packages have experienced some failure in Grades 9 or 10, and as a result their goal is to complete a diploma with as minimum a risk of failure as possible. This goal reduces the attractiveness of packages.

2. Co-operative Education

Co-operative education programming in Ontario illustrates the tenuous link that schools have with business and industry. It was only a short time ago that employment opportunities were few in number and this contributed to great difficulty in obtaining co-operative education placements at all levels, from secondary school to college to university. There is always an element of risk when secondary school programming becomes dependent on the state of the economy. However, the advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages. Perhaps in time, relationships between schools and business and industry will become stronger and better integrated and help to ensure the stability of co-operative education.

Co-operative education has been successful in providing students with necessary credits for graduation in relatively low-risk-of-failure work settings. The notion of low risk as it relates to success or failure in school is an important one in the viability of co-operative education courses. Typically, co-operative education is used with students taking mainly General-level courses to provide some preparation for work while allowing the completion of a diploma. It is rarely used as a prerequisite to post-secondary education. Co-operative education serves many purposes for students at different levels of difficulty, but it appears to offer the most benefit to students taking mainly General- or Basic-level courses who leave school to go directly into the work force. It requires close monitoring and careful consideration in order to sustain relationships with employers and ensure quality learning experiences for students. It is possible to timetable in such a way that minimum conflict with the school experience of students takes place.

3. Alternative and Remedial Programs

Alternative programs such as those epitomized by SWIS are designed to identify students who are at risk of failure and provide them with an individualized alternative that will encourage them to remain in school. The programs are characterized by close student/teacher rapport and can be effective, but, because of the cost, only on a small scale.

Traditionally, students who fall behind by failing courses must repeat the courses in their entirety and in the same time format. Remedial opportunities, available in mathematics and English basic skills and designed to enable students to get back on track in a shorter period of time, would allow students who are at risk of failing to recover without credit loss.

Students who do fail their courses should be provided with opportunities to upgrade within a flexible timeframe so that they will not lose access to other credits while upgrading in one or more courses and they would be more encouraged to stay in school until graduation. While such opportunities are universally available in college upgrading programs, we were unable to find equivalent programming in Ontario's secondary schools.

Both remedial and alternative programs tend to be seen as havens for failures and, therefore, carry some stigma. There is a long tradition in North America of the introduction and later withdrawal of remedial programs. Even though these programs have been demonstrated to be successful, because they carry some stigma and are awkward to implement they are not long-lasting. Nevertheless, alternative, remedial, and flexible upgrading programs all have the potential to retain failing students to graduation.

4. School Atmosphere

There is a substantial base of research on the impact of school atmosphere and its relationship to dropout rates. Those schools that have the capacity to instill in students a sense of pride in the school and a sense of belonging are more likely to hold their students than those that have not. We chose to define school atmosphere broadly to include student-centred orientation, attendance and discipline policy, and extracurricular programming.

Irregular attendance of students can detract from a positive atmosphere in the school. Students taking mainly General-level courses in particular tend to manifest poor attendance patterns. Firm attendance policies such as the "5, 10, 15" program described in Chapter VI do keep students in school where they have a greater chance of completing courses successfully.

One of the schools examined had a school-wide policy of student centredness, that is, the focus was to be on the students and not their courses, resulting in positive student/teacher relationships and improved retention rates. By creating a positive atmosphere and school climate, staff had hoped that students would derive greater satisfaction from their school experience. The school also attempts to implement extracurricular programming attractive to students taking mainly General-level courses. In fact, the school provides the students with a much greater sense of belonging than we typically see across the province.

5. Student Evaluation Procedures

Students who take their courses at the General level are more inclined to remain in school if they complete their courses successfully. In recent years, a number of school principals have actively discouraged their teachers from failing substantial numbers of students. While this has the desired effect of retaining more students to graduation, some teachers feel compromised with regard to the maintenance of academic standards. More recently, Teaching to Pass, the program which incorporates work ethic, attendance, and social skills into student evaluation has contributed to a decline in course failure rates. Ideally, more relevant, career-preparation programs should be implemented to overcome the motivation problems of these students and lead to improved school performance, but we have little evidence of this taking place. What is clear from our analysis is that, whatever circumstances lead to it, a reduction in course failure rates has the greatest potential for reducing dropout rates.

6. Student Services

There was nothing unusual about guidance counselling procedures associated with the exemplary programs studied, even though in a few schools, students and staff had a more positive impression of the guidance department than in others. Counselling approaches have not generally been tailored specifically for students taking mainly General-level courses. Our previous work has shown that the majority of these students are unhappy with the guidance services they receive. Guidance counsellors tend to spend the majority of their time helping students prepare post-secondary education application forms or counselling students with personal problems. Most of the students who plan to go directly from secondary school to work have the impression that counsellors are not particularly concerned with them or knowledgeable about the kinds of work they might seek.

It is our view that guidance services would be more effective for the full range of students if they were integrated with co-operative and special education. This integration would provide counsellors with ready access to information about employment opportunities for non-university bound students, improve access to counselling for those students who take co-operative education, but often feel isolated from the guidance department and, in general, improve student accessibility to a wide range of services.

G. STREAMING AND NON-STREAMING

Much has been made of George Radwanski's proposal to de-stream the secondary schools. Radwanski draws heavily from the work of Jeannie Oakes in making his recommendation. But Dr. Oakes' study was not designed to compare the effect of streaming and non-streaming secondary schools. What she did do was demonstrate that virtually every American secondary school is streamed to some extent and this streaming has a direct impact on what is learned in school and on the future careers of young people. Dr. Oakes does not identify non-streamed secondary schools that are working effectively, nor does she offer anything that might be considered a concrete proposal. Drawing from the social critics' work, she refers to "high-status knowledge" being reserved for students in "high tracks" and suggests that the longer all students have access to this high-status knowledge, the greater equality of opportunity there will be. However, the most important issue is not whether high-status knowledge is available for students in lower tracks, but the role this knowledge plays in determining who will have access to higher education.

In the United States, external examinations play a major role in determining who will be eligible for what post-secondary educational institution. At the present time in Ontario, the sorting of students is managed within the schools using marks and levels of difficulty. It is possible to delay the streaming of students by level of difficulty through one or two years of secondary school, but in Ontario secondary schools some form of streaming will be necessary to determine who will have access to the universities and colleges. The credit system with its individualized student timetables actually goes a long way toward reducing some of the negative effects Oakes describes. On the other hand, it does little to prepare those students who do not go on to university or college for life after secondary school.

H. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The issues of dropouts, the relevance of secondary school programming, and the ability of schools to prepare students for their post-secondary plans are complex. The approach this study has followed to examine these questions has strengths and weaknesses. It is hoped, however, that it offers some direction for educators, which may make school a satisfying and meaningful experience for its students.

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